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'Stability, whatever the cost'

President Hosni Mubarak vowed yesterday to uphold national unity and defend national security and stability regardless of cost. **Nevine Khalil** reports

President Hosni Mubarak, declaring that his main target was the people's welfare, said yesterday he would not "stand by with folded arms" if any group — an indirect allusion to Islamist militants — attempted to harm the nation's interests.

Vowing to preserve national unity and domestic stability, Mubarak said: "If any group attempts to harm Egypt in any way, I will not stand by with folded arms, whatever the cost may be."

He made the remarks in an address at a Ministry of Education camp at the southern Cairo suburb of Helwan, where teachers who had returned from training abroad receive additional instruction.

Noting that terrorism had resulted in a tourism slump in past years, Mubarak said: "The whole of society should stand against terrorism, if we want to give a boost to tourism." He added that Britain, which he had previously accused of giving refuge to terrorists, had become more cooperative of late.

Commenting on the incidents of violence which marred the recent parliamentary elections, Mubarak said that the blame lay with parties from across the political spectrum, not only the ruling National Democratic Party.

"I have no interest in seeing this particular candidate or that one win the election," Mubarak asserted. "I'm only interested in providing a decent living for the people of Egypt." He also praised the impartiality of the security forces during the elections, which were held on 29 November and 6 December.

The reason that the 10 MPs whom he appointed to the new People's Assembly included six Christians was "because of the need for a Coptic representation in the house. Under the flag of Egypt, there is no difference between a Muslim and a Copt."

Affirming his commitment to freedom of expression, Mubarak declared that he welcomed opposition criticism of the government's performance. "For a long time our society was unaccustomed to hear a word of criticism against the system," he said. "But now we have to learn to live in a democracy."

At the same time he stressed his refusal to tolerate irregularities among officials. "I seek the truth," he said, "and refuse to allow the cover-up of corruption".

On the question of negative reporting about Egypt in the foreign media, Mubarak said such coverage was to be expected in light of Egypt's leading role in the area. "As long as we have a pivotal role in the region, Egypt will always be exposed to these campaigns," he said. But he was disappointed that some Egyptians contributed to these attacks "whether deliberately or by laxity. They do not realise the amount of harm they are inflicting on their fellow citizens," he commented.

Mubarak reaffirmed Egypt's opposition to Israel's nuclear weapons programme, declaring that the Middle East should be free of all weapons of mass destruction. "We will continue to raise this issue with Israel until a comprehensive peace is achieved in the region," he pledged. "A nuclear weapon-free region would mean a true peace had been achieved."

On the question of the Yemen-Eritrea confrontation triggered by the latter's occupation of Greater Hanish island in the southern entrance of the Red Sea, Mubarak said that Egypt was maintaining friendly relations with the two countries and took a neutral stand in their dispute.

Mubarak dismissed apprehensions that the construction of a bridge at Luxor to connect the two banks of the Nile would threaten the ancient monuments on the river's west bank. "It is not the bridge that is the problem," he said, "but what might result from its existence."

One possible result could be the haphazard development of unplanned housing at the western end of the bridge, but he assured that it could be "strictly regulated". The bridge, whose construction cost amounted to LE30 million, would be of great benefit to the people of the area, he added.

Mubarak was confident that Egypt would be "in a critical position now," had it not embarked on an economic reform programme in 1982. The programme, he said, has secured for Egypt a stable growth rate, strong industries, salary rises, social stability and infrastructural development. It also lowered the inflation rate and attracted additional foreign investments.

GCC intact

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak met yesterday with Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Al-Thani, Qatar's foreign minister, who arrived in Cairo on an official visit. After the meeting, which was attended by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, Al-Thani declared that Qatar will not withdraw from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Al-Thani said he hopes that the dispute between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and other GCC members over the choice of the GCC secretary-general will be settled amicably. He insisted that Qatar does not want the issue to be blown out of proportion, adding that there was no conflict but simply a disagreement over a legal point.

Six-plus-two

FOREIGN Minister Amr Moussa left for Damascus yesterday to attend the twelfth session of the Damascus Declaration member states. Before his departure, Moussa said that the group, which includes the six Gulf Cooperation Council member states, in addition to Egypt and Syria, will discuss Egypt's document on cooperation among member states in political, economic and security fields.

He also said that the meeting will address the Yemen-Eritrean dispute over the Greater Hanish Island. Currently, Egypt is mediating between the two countries to contain the conflict. Other topics of discussion include the latest developments in the peace process, relations between member states and the Arab League.

Peace chance

YEMEN said it was relying on third parties to mediate in its dispute with Eritrea over three strategic Red Sea islands. Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin said that both sides had failed to agree to an Ethiopian proposal to withdraw their troops from the islands. Yemen said all its troops had already been withdrawn and Eritrea refused a unilateral withdrawal.

A Yemeni military plane headed for the Eritrean capital Asmara yesterday to bring home over 180 Yemenis captured during the fighting and handed over to the Red Cross as a gesture of goodwill. Diplomats in Sanaa said Yemeni forces had prevented two Eritrean military boats from landing on Tuesday on a second island, Jebel Zogar, 17 kilometres north of the island of Hanash Al-Kabir. Eritrea denied the reports.

Prisoners out

PLO and Israeli Justice Ministry officials confirmed yesterday that 1,100 Palestinian prisoners will be freed before next month's Palestinian general elections. Israeli Army radio said they would be freed next week. The releases are part of the Israel-PLO agreement on West Bank autonomy, signed on 28 September. Under the accord, Israel agreed to release 2,300 of the 5,000 Palestinian prisoners in its jails in three stages.

The first group of several hundred was freed days after the signing ceremony. The second batch is the one being freed before the 20 January elections. The third will be released after the May opening of negotiations on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza.

INSIDE

'Good music' for '96

Syria and Israel shared a cautious optimism as they headed into peace talks near Washington following a six-month interruption

Syria and Israel resumed their land-for-peace negotiations near Washington yesterday with an unusual sense of optimism that this time the results would be positive. At stake are the future of the Golan Heights, a strategic border enclave, and the prospect of peace between two countries that have fought three major wars since Israel's founding in 1948.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, determined to accelerate the peace process, has already hinted that Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad could recover the border buffer zone in its entirety in return for the right peace terms. And Assad has let it be known through his own remarks and the Syrian press that he is inclined to come to terms with Israel.

An unusually upbeat Peres said on Tuesday that he was "happy about the new tone" in Damascus which, he said, was increasing the prospects for peace. "We have never had such good music", the prime minister told high school students in Haifa.

Talks between the two sides broke down last June because of differences over security arrangements to accompany the Israeli withdrawal. They agreed to meet again after US Secretary of State Warren Christopher made a trip to the region two weeks ago.

The secluded 1,100-acre riverside Wye plantation, about 80km east of Washington, was selected as the site for the talks, which were due to run from yesterday to Friday and resume after New Year's Day. Christopher, who is on holiday in Santa Barbara, California, plans to return to the Middle East on 10 January to try to push a deal through.

American mediator Dennis Ross will guide the discussions between the three-man delegations, headed by Syrian Ambassador Walid Al-Moualem and Uri Savir of the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

"There is optimism in the region about achieving progress in these negotiations," Al-Moualem said yesterday in an interview with Beirut's leftist daily *As-Safir*. But, he added, "I hope this optimism does not end in disillusionment when the talks are over.

"We are going into the negotiations with an open mind and clear-cut instructions from our leadership to defend our fundamental rights and the unshakeable basics of our position, and to show flexibility in realms that do not endanger these rights."

Reuters quoted a highly-placed Syrian official as saying that "a breakthrough in the negotiations could be achieved very quickly if Israel clearly declares its readiness to withdraw fully from the Golan Heights".

Unannounced, and with the secrecy the Clinton administration hopes will prevail throughout the talks, Ross met separately with the two sides at the State Department on Tuesday.

According to The Associated Press, the outline of a potential accord is clear. Israel would give up the buffer zone from which it can monitor Syrian tank movements and protect villages in northern Israel from shelling. In exchange, Syria would sign a peace treaty with Israel.

The 13,000 Jewish settlers in the Golan Heights may be re-located — Peres says it is premature to discuss their future — and the ski resort on Mount Hermon would be abandoned, along with the vineyards and other industries and agriculture developed during the 28-year Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights.

Whether Clinton would send US peacekeepers to the area or offer Israel a security pact is not clear. "Americans will carry on with you step-by-step, shoulder-to-shoulder to ensure that your struggle for lasting peace with security is achieved", Christopher said on 16 November in Jerusalem.

Administration officials said he was referring to Israel maintaining a qualitative military edge over the Arabs. They pointed out that Israel had not requested either American troops as peacekeepers or a security agreement.

Options being considered for maintaining momentum after the talks include an extended Christopher shuttle between Damascus and Jerusalem, and a meeting between Peres and Assad.



photo: Reuters

In a dual celebration, thousands of Palestinians and pilgrims make their way to the Church of the Nativity on Christmas Eve

After Bethlehem, Ramallah

After Bethlehem celebrated its first Christmas under Palestinian self-rule, it was Ramallah's turn for liberation. **Graham Usher** and **Tarek Hassan** report from the West Bank

"This is the birthplace of Jesus the Messiah, the Palestinian, the Palestinian, the Palestinian," roared Yasser Arafat to the 10,000-strong crowd squeezed into Bethlehem's Manger Square to celebrate Christmas Eve. The statement lacked something in historical accuracy — Jesus, after all, is more commonly recalled as a Jew — but it nevertheless caught the mood of Bethlehem this Christmas, which has been as much a celebration of Palestinian nationalism as of Christ's birth. Throughout this now predominantly Muslim city — with Christians making up a sizeable 40 per cent of its 45,000 inhabitants — icons of Christ were jostling for position with Arafat posters.

Arafat attended midnight mass at the Church of the Nativity, while thousands of Palestinians congregated in Manger Square to hear choirs, watch firework displays and applaud a laser show which, among the usual seasonal greetings, blazed statements calling for the release of all Palestinian prisoners.

The PLO leader's return to Bethlehem marked the high point of a week which has seen Israel redeploy its forces from the city and the arrival of the first battalions of an 850-strong Palestinian police force.

Yesterday was the turn of Ramallah, the seventh and last West Bank town to be handed over to Palestinian control ahead of self-rule elections on 20 January.

Military jeeps carrying the last Israeli soldiers drove away from the military administration headquarters and police station as thousands of Palestinians cheered the end of 28 years of Israeli occupation, the French news agency reported.

Some youths threw stones and empty bottles at the withdrawing jeeps, but the only casualty was a Palestinian youth hurt by a stray rock.

The head of Palestinian police on the West Bank, Gen. Haj Ismail Jaber, and Israeli West Bank commander Gen. Gaby Ophir shook hands at a brief ceremony outside the military administration building. "From now on Ramallah is free", declared Jaber as hundreds of Palestinians stormed into the building and civilians and policemen alike fired guns into the air in celebration.

Ramallah, a prosperous town of 40,000, was decked out with thousands of red-green-black-and-white Palestinian flags on rooftops and lamp-posts. Arafat portraits and banners welcoming the Palestinian Authority flew everywhere. "Ramallah welcomes the lions to their kingdom", read one banner hung between electric poles.

Ramallah was the last of seven West Bank towns to come under Palestinian self-rule since May 1994. Israeli troops will pull out of the larger part of the eighth town, Hebron, by the end of March, but remain in the downtown area to protect 450 Jewish settlers living there.

About 30 Palestinian policemen climbed to the roof of the Ramallah police station and another 20 took control of the military administration building after the Israeli pullout. In all, several hundred Palestinian policemen were due to arrive in the town from the self-rule enclave of Jericho.

Merchants had painted their shutters and storefronts while members of the "Welcoming Committee for the National Security Forces" used megaphones to urge drivers not to use the main streets.

Under the original timetable for extending Palestinian autonomy, the Israelis were scheduled to leave Ramallah today, but as with several towns earlier handed over to Arafat's Palestinian Authority, the withdrawal was moved forward.

The Israeli army declared the city a closed military zone late on Tuesday in preparation for the withdrawal. Palestinian officials said the town would be reopened to the Israelis within 72 hours.

The final obstacle to the withdrawal was lifted on Tuesday with the formal opening of a bypass road which will permit Jewish settlers living north of the town to travel to Jerusalem without passing through Palestinian-ruled territory.

Ramallah, located 10 kilometres north of Jerusalem, is the economic capital of the Palestinian territories. Virtually all the banks and major businesses active in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have their headquarters in the town and surrounding suburbs.

For years, Ramallah was a hotbed of resistance to Israeli occupation. Now it may become Arafat's future seat of government, currently located in Gaza City.

With the Ramallah pullout, virtually all the two million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza will be under Arafat's rule, said Shlomo Dror, spokesman for the outgoing Israeli military government. Only the residents of Hebron, a city of 94,000, and about 40,000 Palestinians in a few scattered villages near Jerusalem and Ramallah remain under Israeli occupation.

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Terrorism tops 1995 events

A random sample of intellectuals, politicians and entertainers rated terrorism as the top event of 1995, with parliamentary elections coming second. They were polled by **Nermeen El-Nawawi**


Khalil


Nafie


El-Kholi


Salama


Badran


Abul Magd


El-Zayyat


Hegazi

Shukri


O. Okasha

Terrorism, which was rated the top news story of 1993 but was relegated to second place by natural disasters in 1994, came back with a vengeance to dominate the events of 1995. Twelve out of 24 writers, politicians, professionals and entertainers, polled by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, were in agreement that the abortive attempt on President Hosni Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa last June and the November bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad combined to earn terrorism that dubious honour.

The parliamentary elections of 29 November and 6 December came second, a court order divorcing Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid from his wife came third, followed by the press crisis triggered by Law 93 for 1995, in fourth place, and the government's clampdown on the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood in fifth.

Press Syndicate chairman Ibrahim Nafie, also the board chairman of the Al-Ahram Organisation and chief editor of *Al-Ahram*, regarded Mubarak's survival in the Addis Ababa attack as the year's most important event. Novelist Sarwat Abaza, head of the Arab Writers' Union, also rated the attempt on Mubarak's life as the year's top event, "because he is the symbol of our country". This view was shared by Yassin Serageddin, spokesman of the Wafd Party, and cinema director Kamal El-Sheikh.

According to poet Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi, the Addis Ababa attack on Mubarak indicated that "terrorists have gone to the extreme of attempting to destroy the state, symbolised by the president of the republic. The battle between the two sides has reached the point of no return."

But Hegazi found the fact that Islamist militants were shifting their attacks outside Egypt's borders a positive sign. "This means that the terrorists have given up their attempt to topple the state from within," he said. "This leaves the government no choice but to respond aggressively."

Soap opera writer Osama Anwar Okasha agreed that the shift in terrorist activities to outside Egypt's borders was a positive sign. "It means that security forces have succeeded in tightening internal security measures," he said.

Political analyst Lutfi El-Kholi said terrorism appeared to be under control locally due to stringent security precautions. Instead, he said: "Terrorism has become an international problem."

Rifaat El-Said, secretary-general of the leftist Tagammu Party, lamented the fact that terrorism was "now a most effective factor in society", adding that, "It was even an effective factor in the parliamentary elections."

Novelist Latifa El-Zayyat believes that "political terrorism is a spin-off of cultural terrorism. If we do not deal with cultural terrorism as seriously as political terrorism," she warned, "violent acts will continue to increase."

Former Prime Minister Mustafa Khalil, who currently serves as deputy chairman of the ruling NDP, said the people's condemnation of terrorism, particularly the Islamabad bombing, was reflected in the results of the parliamentary elections, in which the sweeping majority of Islamist candidates were defeated. "The Pakistan incident awakened the masses to the dangers of terrorism," he said.

Parliamentary elections were rated the second most significant event of the year, mainly because of the unprecedented amount of violence that accompanied them. "Elections should reflect the readiness of society to exercise a higher degree of democracy," said Ahmed Youssef, a professor of political science. "But this year's elections showed that a strong anti-democratic tide is present in society itself, and not in the ruling system. It manifested itself in the forms of thuggery, violence and the distribution of money to buy votes."

Labour Party leader Ibrahim Shukri, who failed in the elections, said hopes had been running high that the elections would be conducted with integrity, providing a model for the future. "But unfortunately what happened was the opposite and it had negative consequences not only for the candidates but for the entire population."

Soap opera writer Mahfouz Abdel-Rahman warned that "the use of violence by the supporters of some candidates was a new trend that could ruin our democratic experiment".

Kamal Abul-Magd, a moderate Islamic thinker, described the elections as the "most frustrating event of the year, adding to the apathy of the apathetic and swelling the number of criminals."

The court order divorcing Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid and his wife Ibtehal Younis occupied third place. Professor Ahmed Okasha, head of the Egyptian Psychiatrists' Association, voted it as the year's top event because "branding someone as infidel is a violation of the freedom of research and expression. This case will definitely leave a negative impact on intellectual life."

"It touched on the very essence of civilisation because, by using the cloak of religion, they [Islamists] sought to muzzle the freedom of research and expression," commented Lutfi El-Kholi, who also rated Abu Zeid's case as the year's top event.

Latifa El-Zayyat viewed Abu Zeid's case as another form of terrorism, and warned that "ideological terrorism leads to armed terrorism in the long run".

The confrontation between the government and the Press Syndicate, triggered by Law 93 for 1995, occupied fourth place. At stake in the dispute, said journalist Amina Shafik, was "the future of democracy itself".

However, feminist Hoda Badran said the government had allowed the press great freedom, but that some journalists had abused this freedom. In her opinion some restrictions were necessary "to avoid having to take even stronger measures in the future".

The trial of Muslim Brotherhood figures by military courts occupied fifth place. "Those trials demonstrated that the more radical groups emerged from the Brotherhood's umbrella," said Abdel-Moeti Hegazi.

Sarwat Abaza believes the group's fortunes are on the wane. "I think that the problem of the Brotherhood will be over soon," he said. "The proof is that the people did not vote for them in the recent elections."

Journalist Salama Ahmed Salama refused to rate the five top events in order of importance, but said that together they "underlined the crisis in the political system. It is as if we are infected with a disease, the symptoms of which appear in different sectors of society."

Journalists in 'model' battle

Although tempers have cooled, confrontation between the government and the Press Syndicate seems set to continue in 1996. **Mona El-Nahhas** chronicles events triggered by Law 93 and efforts to defuse the crisis

Harsh penalties for publication offences, angry journalists meeting in one extraordinary general assembly after another, foot-dragging by a law-drafting committee, unmet deadlines, and, finally, journalists put on trial for alleged libel. These are the main episodes in a seven-month confrontation between the government and the Press Syndicate that have unfolded with the passing of Law 93 for 1995.

It was on 27 May — two days before journalists and media workers were to celebrate Media Day — that the law was pushed through Parliament and approved in the space of a few hours. Journalists, who were kept in the dark about the law's contents until the last minute, were alarmed by the harsh penalties it contained for publication offences. They also objected to its vague and generalised terminology, which could easily be cited against any one of them.

The penalty for publishing false or malicious news or for deriding state institutions or public officials was upped from one year in jail to up to five years' imprisonment. A penalty fine for publishing news that could undermine the public peace or the national economy, or could spread general panic, was raised from LE5,000 to LE20,000.

Worse, the new legislation cancelled Article 135 of the criminal procedures law, which states that journalists cannot be taken into custody while they are being investigated for alleged publication offences.

Journalists were up in arms. Columnists and writers in national newspapers joined the opposition press in castigating the new law. Mustafa Amin, the respected *Al-Akhbar* columnist, compared the law to a "sword hanging over journalists' necks." But a handful of national newspaper journalists defended the legislation as necessary to deter the "trespasses" committed by some of their colleagues.

On 10 June, hundreds of angry journalists met in an extraordinary general assembly at the syndicate, condemned the legislation, and set a 24 June deadline for negotiations with the government to find a way out of the crisis. If agreement could not be reached, the assembly resolved to stage a general strike on the same day.

President Hosni Mubarak met with the syndicate's council, led by Ibrahim Nafie, for five hours on 21 June and agreed to refer the controversial law to the Supreme Constitutional Court for a legal opinion. Mubarak also vowed that a new "comprehensive" press law would be prepared in the space of three months, to replace Law 93 and other laws dealing with press freedom. This compromise was enough to cause a second general assembly to decide, on 24 June, to call off the one-day work stoppage. But the assembly said it reserved the right to go ahead with the strike if negotiations with the government reached a dead end.





PRIZE REPORTING: At a grand ceremony at Al-Gala'a club in Heliopolis, a group of *Al-Ahram*'s military reporters and photographers, including the *Weekly*'s Galal Nassar, were honoured last Saturday for outstanding work in 1995. *Al-Ahram*'s board chairman Ibrahim Nafie received the shield of the armed forces, on behalf of all Egyptian military reporters, in his capacity as Press Syndicate chairman.

Galal Nassar was awarded the news features' prize for the third year running, in an annual competition organised by the Press Syndicate and the Morale Orientation Department of the armed forces. Two of his features, "Farewell Britannia" and "Spy in the Sky", which appeared in the *Weekly* in the course of the year, were cited for particular praise.

Al-Ahram's photographer Tony Fares received an award for the year's best picture. The well-deserved prizes were handed to the winners by Lt. Gen. Magdi Hetata, chief of staff of the armed forces, and Maj. Gen. Samir Farag, chief of the Morale Orientation Department.

In mid-July the semi-governmental Higher Press Council set up a 30-person committee to draft a new press law. But the syndicate objected to the make-up of this body, arguing that it was heavily weighted in favour of the ruling party and advocates of press restrictions. To accommodate the syndicate's council, four journalists who strongly opposed Law 93 were added to the committee — a move which was viewed by most journalists as a positive step. The committee began its deliberations at the end of August.

On 5 September, the third general congress of Egyptian journalists was held, not only to publicise opposition to Law 93, but also to address the broader issues of democracy, press freedom, access to information and the future of the profession. The recommendations of the congress were presented to the law-drafting committee.

But a third general assembly that met on 8 October noted that the committee had met only twice and had accomplished very little. As a result, the assembly set a 24 December deadline for the committee to complete its work, threatening a walkout by the syndicate's members serving on the committee if this was not met.

The assembly also asked the syndicate's council to set up its own committee to draft an alternative press law that would be passed on, for guidance, to the government-appointed committee. The action preceded the Constitutional Court's refusal to pronounce a legal opinion on whether or not some articles of Law 93 were constitutional on the grounds that the law was not the subject of a legal dispute being heard in courts.

The law drafted by the syndicate's committee excludes imprisonment as a punishment for publication offences and reduces the penalty fine to LE2,000. It also lifts all restrictions on the publication of newspapers and states that newspapers should not be confiscated nor be subject to any type of censorship.

The draft also seeks to protect journalists against government pressure: journalists should not be taken into custody in the course of their work; they should not be banned from publishing their articles; and they are not to be dismissed because of articles they have published.

Despite government promises that Law 93 would remain dormant, Magdi Hussein, chief editor of the Labour Party's mouthpiece *Al-Shaab*, was put on trial on charges of slandering Ala'a El-Alfi, son of Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi. The charges were brought under Law 93. Hussein's lawyers sought the judge's permission to contest the legality of the legislation before the Supreme Constitutional Court. Hearings have been postponed until 31 January.

Gamal Badawi, chief editor of the opposition *Al-Wafd*, was the second journalist to fall victim to Law 93. He is facing libel charges for printing a story alleging that Hassan Sallam, a member of the outgoing People's Assembly, was guilty of seizing state property. Badawi's trial has been set for 18 January.

And Abdel-Aal El-Baqouri, chief editor of the leftist *Al-Ahali*, was sentenced *in absentia* by the Damanhour criminal court to two years' imprisonment and fined LE50,000 for accusing a police brigadier of misusing his influence. However, this sentence will automatically be quashed once El-Baqouri appears in person before the court, and a re-trial will have to be ordered.

Struggle continues

A FOURTH extraordinary general assembly of journalists, which met on Sunday, has vowed to continue the struggle against Law 93, deciding to re-convene on 10 March 1996. But the assembly said it should be summoned to a meeting at an earlier date by the Press Syndicate's council in case the government-appointed committee completed preparation of the new law, or if it became clear that the committee was deliberately procrastinating or that its discussions ran counter to the journalists' demands.

The assembly upheld the view that the draft prepared by the syndicate's legal committee was "the official comprehensive document embodying all the rights and duties of the profession as journalists perceive them."

"Our target remains unchanged: to reject Law 93 and have it replaced with a new press law," Syndicate Chairman Ibrahim Nafie told the assembly. "Our struggle is a model example of the dialogue that should take place between professional syndicates and the government."

Several speakers who addressed the assembly were pessimistic about the position which the new People's Assembly may take on a new press law. "What we fear is that they would take our law and the law prepared by the government-appointed committee and come up with something totally different from what the journalists want," said leftist journalist Hussein Abdel-Razek.

Cornered militants strike abroad

Apparently losing the battle with the security forces at home, Islamist militants began targeting Egyptian interests abroad in what was viewed as a strategy shift. But, as **Shaden Shehab** reports, the militants also continued to make their presence felt in southern Egypt

A hail of automatic rifle fire discharged against President Hosni Mubarak's motorcade in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa on 26 June underlined a shift in the strategy of Islamist militants bent on overthrowing his government. Five months later, on another continent, a suicide bomber drove a car packed with explosives into the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad, destroying the compound, killing 17 people and wounding 60 others. The strategy shift had become clear: the militants, faced by unrelenting police pressure at home, were directing their wrath at Egyptian targets abroad.

Mubarak had arrived in Addis Ababa to attend the opening of an Organisation of African Unity (OAU) summit. As his motorcade emerged from the airport, the militants' bullets rang out, hitting the armour-plated limousine in which the president was riding. Egyptian security guards jumped out of their car, took up defensive positions and fired back. Two assailants — later identified as Abdel-Qoddous Al-Qadi and Mustafa Abdel-Aziz — were killed on the spot. Two Ethiopian police escorts were killed by the assailants' fire.

Mubarak, who was unhurt, ordered his driver to turn back and head for the airport, from where he flew back to Cairo. A joint Ethiopian-Egyptian investigation later proved that a second group of militants, armed with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), had been lurking in a second ambush further along the president's intended route. It was said that it was Mubarak's bullet-proof car, specially flown from Cairo, which allowed him to escape unscathed. Also it seems that Mubarak, who kept his cool, did the right thing by ordering the driver to turn back. The RPGs of the second ambush could have wrecked his armoured limousine.

Five days later, Ethiopian police raided a house near the site of the attack and killed three gunmen holed up inside. Police identified the dead as Sherif Abdel-Rahman, described as the leader of the assassination squad, Abdel-Hadi Mohamed and Mohamed Abdel-Radi.

Two months later, three other assailants — Abdel-Karim El-Nadi, El-Arabi Sedki Hafez and Safwat Hassan Abdel-Ghani — were arrested by Ethiopian police. The three were said to be members of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya.

A ninth member of the assassination squad — initially named as Mohamed Siraj but later identified as Hussein Ahmed Sheneit — managed to elude Ethiopian police and fled the country, reportedly returning to Sudan.

Both Egypt and Ethiopia blamed Sudan for the attack. Ethiopian police said the assassination attempt was planned and coordinated from Sudan by Mustafa Hamza, a leader of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, and his aide, code-named Ezzat Yassin. Ethiopia requested Sudan to extradite the two, along with Sheneit, but Khartoum denied that the three were on its territory.

Mubarak was unhurt but workers and visitors at the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad were not so lucky. On the morning of 19 November, an unknown person hurled explosives at the embassy's gate, forcing it open. A suicide bomber then sped through the gate with a car packed with 250 kilogrammes of explosives, ramming it into the embassy building. The two attackers were believed to have been killed, along with 17 other people who were inside the compound. The Egyptian ambassador, Mohamed Nouman Galal, who worked in an embassy annex, was unhurt.

Several militant groups, including Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, Jihad and the hitherto-unheard-of International Justice, claimed responsibility for the attack. Several suspects were arrested, including Ahmed Said Khedr, an Egyptian-Canadian who is believed to have funded the assailants.

Some analysts linked the embassy attack to the disappearance of Talaat Fouad Qassem, spokesman for Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, who was arrested in Croatia on 12 September and then deported to an unknown destination. In retaliation, a booby-trapped car exploded in the Croatian port city of Rijek on 20 October, killing one person and wounding 29 others. Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya took responsibility and warned that "much blood would be shed", unless Qassem was released.

A newsletter published by Europe-based militants later claimed that Qassem was turned over by Croatian authorities to American agents who questioned him aboard an American vessel in the Adriatic. The Americans then put Qassem on an Egyptian ship that brought him to Port Said, the newsletter alleged.

In between the attempt on Mubarak's life and the embassy attack, the Egyptian trade counsellor at the UN mission in Geneva, Ala Eddin Nazmi, was shot and killed on 13 November by unknown attackers. Several militant groups claimed responsibility, alleging that Nazmi was a security agent stationed in Europe to track down militants who took refuge there. But analysts also discerned a link between Nazmi's killing and Qassem's disappearance.

The assumption that the militants had turned the world into a stage for their operations received additional corroboration when Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, Al-Gama'a's spiritual leader, and nine of his followers were found guilty by a grand jury in New York of plotting the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing that killed six people and injured more than 1,000. They were also convicted of planning to blow up the United Nations building and vital highway tunnels in New York. The 10 could face life imprisonment terms when they are sentenced in January.

Domestically, security forces continued to clamp down on militants, thwarting several major planned attacks. On 21 September, police foiled what was described as a major terrorist operation only hours before it was to be executed, targeting crowds assembled outside a police institute at Torah, south of Cairo. Police raided the militants' hideouts, killing two and arresting 50 in the governorates of Cairo, Giza, Qalyubia and Al-Minya. The attack was said to have been ordered by Mustafa Hamza, the same man who masterminded the attempt on Mubarak's life.

On 24 November, security forces thwarted a plan to explode a car packed with 150 kilogrammes of explosives in the Cairo district of Khan Al-Khalili bazaar and to assassinate a number of high officials. The scheme was said to be the brainchild of seven Jihad leaders residing in London and Khartoum. As many as 36 suspects were arrested.

A third scheme by the Jihad group to commit acts of subversion and assassinations during the recent parliamentary elections was also foiled. Two terrorists were killed in separate shootouts with police and 56 others, including several who had infiltrated the country from Sudan, were arrested. They included Egyptian-born Akram Abdel-Aziz, a naturalised Briton. Five Sudanese nationals were also arrested for guiding the Egyptian militants across the border.

In Upper Egypt, terrorist violence and police counter-violence continued sporadically throughout the year, particularly in the governorate of Al-Minya. Security authorities ordered that sugar-cane plantations alongside the local highways should be destroyed because they provided ideal hideouts for militants. The flashpoint in Al-Minya continued to be the town of Mallawi, which has been under a dusk-to-dawn curfew for over a year.

Assembly fever

A new People's Assembly was elected in December to usher the nation to the threshold of the 21st century. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reviews events

The banners, streamers and posters that sprouted in the streets of Cairo and other cities and towns indicated that the nation was approaching a momentous electoral crossroads, which could determine its fate for the coming five years. Euphoria was in the air as the 29 November date of nationwide parliamentary elections approached. The government vowed impartiality; opposition *parties decided to participate, reversing their 1990* boycott; and a record number of candidates threw themselves into the fray.

But major incidents of violence marred the November vote as well as the 6 December second-round runoffs. By Interior Ministry count, 36 people were killed and 411 others were injured, although a human-rights group put the number of fatalities at 51 and the injured at around 800.

Opposition parties, which barely managed to establish a foothold in the new People's Assembly, charged that *ballot boxes had been filled with* rigged votes after their observers were barred from many polling stations. The government, however, rejected the fraud charges, insisting that it had played fair. Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif described the elections as a "*festival for democracy*".

A record 3,980 candidates contested the elections, compared to 2,681 in 1990. In the first round, the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) won 124 seats, and 14 independents, including 11 NDP sympathisers, also made it to the House. Opposition parties failed to win a single seat.

Following the second-round runoffs, the NDP's share soared to 318 seats, or 71 per cent of the Assembly's 444 contested seats. But the NDP's majority could rise to as many as 417 seats, or 93 per cent of the total, if 99 winning independents are accepted into the ruling party's fold.

Fifteen seats, or 3 per cent, went to the opposition, including six to the Wafd, five to the leftist Tagammu, two to the Nasserist Party and one to the Liberal *Party. A lone candidate from the outlawed Muslim* Brotherhood emerged victorious, but later joined the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. The remaining 12 seats are believed to have been won by "genuine independents."

Prominent NDP winners included two cabinet ministers — Minister of Supply Ahmed Gweili, who was elected to the House for the first time, and veteran MP Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, minister of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments). The speaker of the outgoing Assembly, Fathi Sorour, as well as his two deputies, El-Sayed Rashed and Ahmed Hammadi, also won and retained their posts in the new House. Five women, all NDP members, were also successful.

Winners from the opposition *included* the Wafd Party's Yassin Serageddin and Ayman Nour, Tagammu's Khaled Mohieddin and El-Badri Farghali and Nasserists Sameh Ashour and Mahmoud Zeinhom.

Opposition losers were led by Ibrahim Shukri, the Labour Party leader, who failed in the first round in his home town, Sherbin, (Daqahliya) and Diaeddin Dawoud, leader of the Democratic Nasserist Party, who failed in the runoffs in Fareskour in the north of the Nile Delta.

Other losers from the opposition included the Wafd Party's No'man Gomaa and Mounir Fakhri Abdel-Nour, Tagammu's Abul-Ezz El-Hariri, the Liberal Party's Mustafa Bakri and the Muslim Brotherhood's Moukhtar Nouh and Seif El-Islam Hassan El-Banna.

Several independents who had put up a strong opposition to the government in the outgoing Assembly also lost. They included Farouk Metwalli in Suez City, Mohamed El-Badrashini in Alexandria, Ibrahim Ibada in Sharqiya *and Ibrahim Awara in Tanta.*

Not a single Copt managed to win a seat. To correct this situation, President Hosni Mubarak, acting under his constitutional authority, issued a decree appointing 10 members, including six Christians, to the new Assembly.



HORROR CRASH: **A speeding train, transporting railway workers, slammed into the rear of a passenger train which had stopped at the Al-Badrashein station, 20 kms south of Cairo, in foggy weather last Thursday, killing at least 62 people and wounding 64 others. Three cars of the passenger train, which was heading from Cairo to Assiut, rammed the other train and caused other coaches to derail, witnesses said. *Rescue workers battled to free passengers trapped* in the tangled wreckage and ambulances cruised the streets of Al-Badrashein to plead through loudspeakers for volunteers to give blood** *(photo: Reuters)*

Nile waters bubble with trouble

Last summer's abortive attempt on President Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa brought Egypt and the Sudan close to the brink of war, writes **Galal Nassar**

Traditionally warm relations between Egypt and the Sudan have sunk to their lowest ebb over the past few years, with the Sudan reviving a territorial claim to the *Ha*layeb border triangle, and Cairo accusing Khartoum of sheltering Islamist terrorists.

The tension rose to a climax at the end of June, when President Hosni Mubarak became the target of an abortive assassination attempt *in the* Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. Although the assailants were Egyptian, Cairo held Sudan responsible for the attack.

The two Nile Valley neighbours nearly went to war, with Egypt delivering threats of a retaliatory military strike, and the Sudan brandishing the "Nile waters weapon."

As tempers flared, Egyptian and *Sudanese patrols* exchanged fire *in* the disputed Halayeb region on 27 June, one day following the Addis Ababa attack. As a result, a Sudanese was killed, and two others and an Egyptian were wounded. Egypt beefed up its presence in the area, *kicking out 70 Sudanese po*licemen, although 900 others remained — virtually under siege from Egyptian forces.

In a series of speeches delivered at the time, Mubarak warned: "I hope they do not resort to escalation because I will not remain standing by with folded arms. If they do, *there are many measures* which I can take to reach my objective."

Sudan, however, responded by further troubling already troubled waters. Sudanese National Islamic Front leader Hassan El-Torabi, widely considered as the power-behind-the-throne in Khartoum, warned that the Sudan was capable of reducing, if not withholding altogether, the *amount of Nile water* reaching Egypt. Although this was an empty threat, because Sudan is thought to lack the technical ability to enforce it, Egypt took it seriously.

Mubarak said that "all options, in*cluding the military option*, are open if the Sudanese government crosses the red line." Similarly, Egyptian Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi warned that "water and territory are red lines which the Sudanese government will not be allowed to cross; otherwise it will *face a military strike.*"

At the root of the crisis were Sudan's decision to revive its claim to Halayeb and Egyptian charges that Khartoum ran training camps for Jihad and Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiya militants bent on overthrowing Mubarak's government by violent means.

Egypt, insisting that Halayeb was part of its territory, launched a development plan for the region, including the construction of schools, houses, roads, and water and power stations. Although Halayeb is located north of the 22nd parallel, the international boundary line between the two countries, Sudan had been *granted administrative powers there* in the past. In the Egyptian view, however, this did not mean that Sudan held sovereignty over the re*gion. The Sudanese government of* President Omar El-Bashir, Egypt argued, had acted to revive the dispute to cover up deteriorating economic conditions back home.

In blaming Sudan for harbouring Islamist terrorists, Egypt pointed an accusing finger at El-Torabi, who was said to have targeted neighbouring African states with an "international Islamicisation" cam*paign. In addition to Egypt*, El-Torabi's targets were thought to include Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Algeria, Central Africa, Djibouti and Libya.

Egypt supplied several African states with information on camps in and around Khartoum where Egyptian, Arab and African militants were said to be receiving military training. Egypt also monitored the presence of two *Egyptian Jihad* leaders on Sudanese soil — Sarwat Salah Shehata and Adel El-Sayed Abdel-Qoddous. The two, who had been sentenced to death *in absentia*, had been accused of providing rank-and-file militants with suicide-*attack training before sending them* across the Egyptian border to launch subversion and assassination attempts.

Old sins haunt ties

Egypt and Israel found themselves embroiled in two disputes this year over the latter's refusal to agree to the NPT, and disclosures of the killing of Egyptian POWs, writes **Nevine Khalil**

Although Egypt continued to promote a comprehensive peace settlement for the region, two unexpected disputes clouded *Egyptian-Israeli relations this year.* The first came when the two countries, which are bound by a 16-year-old peace treaty, became involved in a heated diplomatic confrontation in the Spring due to Israel's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The dust had hardly settled when the second occurred: Egyptians raised a national outcry over Israeli disclosures that *hundreds of* Egyptian prisoners of war had been killed in cold blood by Israeli soldiers during the 1956 and 1967 wars.

Egypt, which has been campaigning for years to banish weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East, targeted Israel's nuclear programme before a month-long conference on the indefinite renewal of the NPT opened in New York in April. The Egyptian argument was that nuclear disarmament was a prerequisite for regional stability; *otherwise a nuclear-arms* race could begin in the region. Egypt wanted Israel to confine its programme to peaceful purposes and to submit it to international inspection.

Although Egypt made it clear that it would not *withdraw from the* NPT, Israel refused to budge on the issue, citing alleged Iraqi and Iranian nuclear threats. Israel also turned down the Egyptian demand for international inspections. On 11 May, the New York conference adopted a proposal reached by consensus, without a vote, to extend the 25-year-old accord indefinitely.

Egypt, which is banned by the treaty's provisions from producing nuclear weapons, though Israel is not, appeared to have lost the first round. But Foreign Minister Amr Moussa remained determined. "We will continue until Israel joins the treaty," he said.

Moussa also sought to keep the issue alive. He declared during a visit to Cairo by Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak on Monday that Egypt wanted Israel's nuclear programme to be placed on the agenda of the multilateral negotiations.

Israel's new prime minister, Shimon Peres, appears to have softened the Israeli position slightly. *He announced this week that Israel* would be prepared to dismantle its nuclear weapons programme once a comprehensive peace is achieved in the region. Egypt raised a furore in August when a retired Israeli army general, Ayre Biro, admitted *that he had shot 49 Egyptian POWs* in cold blood during the 1956 Suez War. The admission was followed by horrifying stories, in both Egyptian and Israeli newspapers, of the gruesome killings of Egyptian prisoners in the 1956 and 1967 wars, stories which prompted Likud politician Ariel Sharon to comment that Israel was committing "national suicide." The image that Is*rael projects of a disciplined* and ethics-abiding army had been destroyed forever. Israel counter-charged, however, that similar atrocities had been committed by the Egyptians during the 1948 and 1973 wars, but produced no material proof to back the accusations.

A shocked public in Egypt called for a Nuremberg-style tribunal to be set up in Sinai to try the Israeli *war criminals. But this was ruled* out by Barak during his Cairo visit. Other Egyptians demanded also the payment of financial compensation to the families of the killed soldiers. Several lawsuits were filed in Egyptian courts against the Israeli government, and *Al-Ahram* organised an expedition to the Sinai that uncovered two mass graves of Egyptian POWs killed during the *1967 war near the coastal town of* Al-Arish.

The two issues seem set to drag on, not only into 1996, but for years to come.

The axe finally fell

1995 was a bad year for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. **Dina Ezzat** looks in retrospect at the military trials of their prominent figures and their setback in the parliamentary elections

Since they restrict themselves to Islamic feasts, members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood would not usually celebrate the advent of a new Anno Domini year. And yet they may have special reasons to rejoice that 1995 is over. For, as far as they were concerned, it has all been bad news.

After gaining control of the majority of professional syndicates in the first few years of this decade, the illegal group had been hoping to score an additional political feat by winning a *fair* number of seats in the 1995 parliamentary elections.

As the year opened, the group, which had boycotted the 1990 elections along with the majority of opposition parties, announced its intention to contest the 1995 ballot.

But the Brotherhood's hopes in '95 corresponded *to a shift in the government's at*titude towards them. Having tolerated the illegal group as a relatively moderate counterbalance to the militant armed groups such as Jihad and Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, the authorities increasingly began to look at the Brotherhood as an underhanded pro*moter* of terrorism. Especially worrying were the organisation's strong links abroad, particularly with the Islamic regime in Sudan, which Egypt and other regional states *accuse of harbouring and exporting Islamist* terrorism.

No less than President Hosni Mubarak underlined this change of outlook as early as January of last year. Speaking to the *New Yorker* magazine, Mubarak told his interviewer that "frankly, I must tell you this whole problem of terrorism throughout the Middle East is a by-product of our own illegal Muslim Brotherhood — whether it is Jihad, Hezbollah, in Lebanon, or Hamas. *They all* sprang from beneath the umbrella of the Muslim Brotherhood. They say they have renounced violence but, in reality, they were responsible for all this violence and the time will come when they will be uncovered."

Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi, for his part, *declared repeatedly* that the outlawed organisation was "using the cloak of religion to reach political power." The Brotherhood was accused of backing terrorist movements everywhere — in Egypt, Arab and Islamic states — because their activities serve its ultimate objective. And the public was reminded of the "bloody record of the Brotherhood's underground military arm," which had carried out political assassinations in the 1940s.

Senior Brotherhood figures responded that the organisation had renounced violence a long time ago. Stressing that the "underground arm" is now history, the organisation's deputy Supreme Guide Salah Mashhour and spokesman Maamoun El-Hodeibi asserted that "seizing power is the last thing we [the organisation] could think of." They counter-charged that the government "apparently believes that whosoever opposes it has designs to grab power."

The government's accusations were soon followed by action. Police arrested 27 leading Brotherhood figures on charges of seeking to revive the activities of an outlawed organisation. Those arrested included Dr Essam El-Eryan, secretary-general of the Doctors' Syndicate and a former member of parliament, and Dr Ibrahim El-Zaafarani, secretary of the Alexandria chapter of the same syndicate. The 27 were also accused of propagating opposition to the government and establishing contact with foreign organisations for the purpose of undermining democracy.

More arrests were made, raising to 83 the number of Brotherhood figures who were later referred to military trials in three separate cases. Some were accused of liaising *with the underground Jihad group*, which has taken responsibility for many acts of violence including the 1981 assassination of President Anwar El-Sadat and last June's attempt on the life of President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa.

Prosecution officials said at the time — last February — that they had in their possession a videotape of a meeting of some of those arrested at the group's downtown headquarters. In this meeting, members of *the group had allegedly made plans for the* outlawed organisation to contest the parliamentary elections as a "means of Jihad" for setting up an Islamic state.

Brotherhood officials charged that the state security swoop was designed to prevent some of those arrested from running for election. However over 100 Brotherhood candidates ran for election as independents. They included some of the organisation's prominent figures such as spokesman El-Hodeibi, *Seif El-Islam* Hassan El-Banna, son of the organisation's founder and secretary-general of the Bar Association, Moukhtar Nouh, the Bar Association's treasurer, and Mohamed Abdel-Qoddous, a member of the Press Syndicate's council.

They all *failed* to *win seats*. Only one Brotherhood figure, Ali Sayed Fat'h El-Bab, managed to make it to the House, and he later joined the Islamist-oriented Labour party. *The* Brotherhood charged that the vote had been rigged and that its supporters had been rounded up on the eve of the elections. The government, however, rejected the accusations, describing the group's members as "terrorists in disguise."

Parallel to their electoral setback were the *sentences passed against Brotherhood mem*bers by military courts. Five, including Essam El-Eryan and Mohamed El-Sayed Habib, an Assiut university professor, were sentenced to five-years' imprisonment with hard labour. Forty-two others got three years with hard labour. They included Ibrahim El-Zaafarani and Hassan El-Gamal, a former member of parliament. Nine others were sentenced to three years behind bars and a further 27 were acquitted.

The Supreme *Military* Court *also* ordered the shutdown of the group's headquarters in Tawfikiyah street in central Cairo, which had been active for the past 20 years. The order was enforced by the security forces barely an hour after it was pronounced by the court.



Thinking in the dock

An offshoot of the growing ideological influence of fundamentalism was the phenomenon of Islamist lawyers attempting to muzzle freedom of expression by dragging intellectuals to court. As **Amira Howeidy** recounts, the judiciary's response has not been uniform

Shock greeted the decision last June by a Cairo Appeals Court ordering Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, a professor of Arabic literature, divorced from his wife on the grounds that his writings amounted to a *renunciation of the teachings of Islam*. Under Islamic law, a non-Muslim cannot marry a Muslim woman.

The case against Abu Zeid was the most publicised *in a series of lawsuits filed by Islamist law*yers against intellectuals, writers and entertainers whose work they considered offensive to Islamic sentiment or in violation of Islamic doctrine. Another lawsuit that grabbed public attention was the ban, subsequently lifted, of Youssef Chahine's film *The Emigrant.*

The *lawsuit against Abu Zeid, demanding* the breakup of his marriage to Ibtihal Younis, a lecturer in French literature, on the grounds that he is an apostate, was initiated by Islamist lawyers near the end of 1993. The case was initially dismissed by a Giza court, with the judge arguing that those who initiated it had no direct interest. But the Cairo Appeals Court reversed that *decision and ordered Abu* Zeid's separation from his wife.

The conflicting orders issued by the two courts depended on whether the presiding judge accepted the allegedly Islamic doctrine of *hesba* as a basis for litigation. This doctrine allows any Muslim to take legal action against any person whom he believes has inflicted harm on Islam.

Abu Zeid's problems began three years earlier when he applied for promotion and submitted two *of his research works — Imam Al-Shafei* and *A Critique of Religious Discourse* — to an examining committee.

Two members of the three-man committee did not object to Abu Zeid's work, but the view of Abdel-Sabbour Shahin, a professor of Arabic linguistics, eventually prevailed. Shahin accused Abu *Zeid of rejecting the fundamental tenets of* Islam and recommended that he be denied promotion.

Cairo University then requested the assistance of Mohamed El-Beltagui, a professor of Islamic jurisprudence, who also accused Abu Zeid of "showing great hostility to the texts of the Qur'an" in his writings. Mustafa El-Shaq'aa, dean of Ain Shams University's Faculty of Arts, also branded Abu Zeid as an "infidel".

Abu Zeid and his wife have vowed to remain together despite the court's order and are believed to be in Europe at present. In the meantime, their lawyers have contested the court order and hearings are continuing through January. Three "solidarity with Abu Zeid" committees have also been *formed.*

Unlike the case against Abu Zeid, which was first dismissed and then upheld by a higher court, Youssef Chahine's *The Emigrant* took the opposite course. Initially, the film was banned by a lower court on 29 December 1994, on the grounds that it depicted the Biblical character of Joseph, whom *Muslims revere as a prophet*, thus making his pictorial depiction forbidden. But the higher court ordered the ban to be lifted on 29 March, with Judge Siefallah Husseibeh declaring that the plaintiffs had no direct interest in the case and did not stand to benefit from it legally. "It is true that Egypt has lots of problems but it also has brains that can *think*", *Chahine commented.*

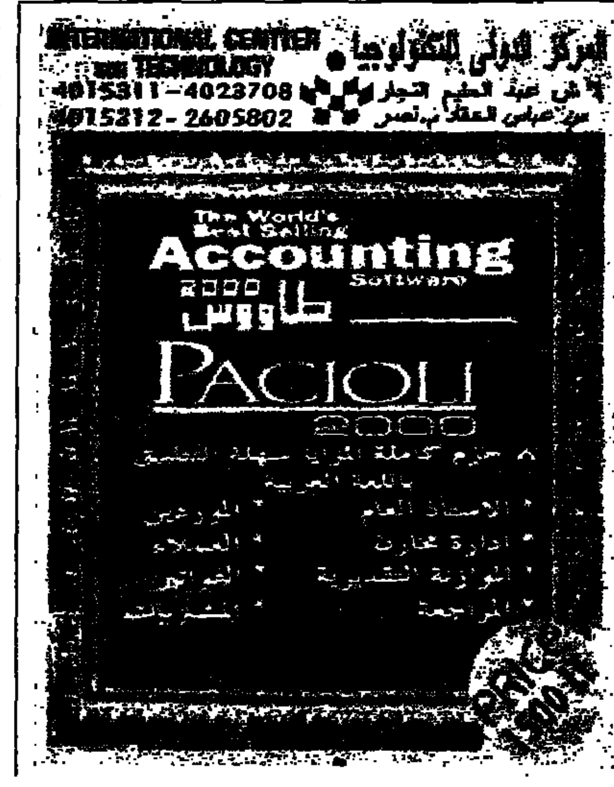
Adel Imam's film *Birds of Darkness* was targeted by another Islamist lawyer, Mahmoud Riad, who filed a lawsuit demanding its prohibition because he alleged it "tarnishes the dignity of lawyers and their profession". The film, dealing with the phenomenon of lawyers dragging public figures to court, amounted to an outcry against this dangerous trend. The film's scriptwriter, Wahid Hamed, described the lawyers who took action against the film as "the real birds of darkness". Riad, however, dropped the suit a week later.

Some analysts believe the litigation trend emerged because other channels of expression were closed to Islamists. However, others claimed that the Islamist lawyers were merely seeking fame and publicity. Kamal Abul-Magd, a moderate Islamic *thinker and lawyer, said* the trend indicated the "bankruptcy of civil society". It also reflected the "politicisation of the Bar Association, which has begun to assume the role of political parties and authorities".

Two lawyers later initiated legal action against actress Youssra, who played the leading role in *Birds of Darkness*, because her "scandalous" picture "that is offensive to ethics and principles", appeared on the cover of a cinema magazine. In the film, Youssra played the role of a prostitute. The court has yet to make a decision.

*Other lawsuits were filed against writers and jour*nalists, including Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz and *Al-Akhbar* newspaper's Farouk El-Shazli, Mahmoud El-Saadani and Gamal El-Ghitani. Mahfouz was targeted because he was quoted in a newspaper interview as saying the fact that he had survived an assassination attempt indicated that "El-Gabalawi" was not angry with him. The plaintiffs argued that this amounted to a *confession* by Mahfouz that the protagonist of his novel *Children of Gabalawi* was God — a claim which Mahfouz has denied for years.

But the Mansoura Criminal Court threw out the case on Monday, again on the grounds that the plaintiffs had no direct interest. The defence lawyer had argued that these lawsuits should come to an end because their only aim was to intimidate writers and thinkers — a view shared by the sweeping majority of intellectuals.



Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Taking



The fifth year of transition from central planning to a market economy brought mixed results

E[illegible]eurs upsurge

A LONG-standing government goal of boosting economic activity came one step closer to fruition as the private sector widened its activities over the year, accounting for some 62.3 per cent of the GDP in the fiscal year 1994-95.

From the beginning of the year, private sector activity was surging. Credit extended to private businesses by the banks, at the end of fiscal year 1995 (30 June), showed a 31.5 per cent increase over the previous year to reach LE49.929 billion, or approximately 47 per cent of the total credit extended by the banks.

Increased private sector activity contributed to improving growth rates, which registered 4.5 per cent in the fiscal year 1994-95. Coupled with increased exports, favourable growth rates helped put the Egyptian economy back in the IMF's good books; a development which promises to bring Egypt a long awaited debt reduction.

Information provided by the government-affiliated Companies Department and the General Authority for Investment indicates that in the period up to November, about 2,000 new companies were established, with a total issued capital of about LE8 billion.

However, private sector businessmen say these figures are actually much lower than they should be, and they have demanded that the government offer more incentives and concessions to private businesses in the form of tax reductions and grace periods, streamlining the bureaucracy and enacting a new labour law allowing employers to be more flexible with wages and hiring policies.

Peace in the bank

AFTER much debating and deliberating, Egypt had its way when the Middle East Development Bank (MEDB) was officially inaugurated at the Amman economic summit in October. The Cairo-based bank will kick off with a start-up fund of $5 billion and a paid-in capital of $1.25 billion. The bank's main objective is to assist in the financing of private sector projects.

Shareholders met in Cairo in November to allocate shares for the MEDB, which will begin operations in mid-1997, and to put the finishing touches to the agreement.

Twenty countries covered 75 per cent of the bank's capital, while the remaining 25 per cent were left open in case opposing countries change their minds.

The US, the largest shareholder with $750 million, and Egypt, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinians were the main proponents of a regional bank.

Despite continuing opposition from EU countries such as France, Germany, Britain, and Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, the November meeting was attended by former opponents like Austria, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain — an indication that the idea is winning broader support.

A task force currently entrusted with the job of establishing the bank will meet every month, and the next meeting is scheduled for the first week of February.

Inflation deflation

AS THE annual inflation rate fell from 1994's high of 12 per cent to 7 per cent, according to figures released in October, government economists found cause to celebrate. Although the annual inflation rate since 1991 has fallen from nearly 20 per cent to reach a low of 6.3 per cent in the summer of 1994, it had rocketed up again later in the year.

Moreover, in the beginning of 1995, pessimistic analysts argued that new increases in inflation undermine government efforts to protect the exchange rate against devaluation. But, their fears proved to be short-lived as the stabilising inflation rate restored the IMF's confidence in the Egyptian economy and helped the government withstand IMF pressure to devalue the pound. In addition, lower inflation gave weight to Egypt's argument that devaluation would be translated into a higher import bill and inflation rates.

The IMF had argued that an inflation rate differential with Egypt's main trading partners meant that the currency was about 25-40 per cent overvalued, and hindered all export promotion efforts.

Room with a view

FINDING a room with a beach-front view in any of the Red Sea resorts this year proved to be a challenge even for someone with connections like Santa's. Following three years of dwindling tourism revenues, with hotel managers desperately offering cut-rate packages to any and all takers in an attempt to lure tourists frightened off by a wave of terrorist attacks, this year's influx of foreign guests broke new records and signalled a strong recovery for one of Egypt's biggest industries.

Throughout the year, the country's hotels were fully-booked. In the first ten months of the year, 2.6 million tourists had visited Egypt, spending, in all, 17.5 million tourist nights in hotels.

Figures for the January-May 1995 period indicate that revenue from tourism increased by 38.7 per cent to reach $873.7 million compared to $630.1 million for the same period in 1994. These figures raised fresh hopes that a full recovery for this industry is coming in the not-too-distant future, and that revenues accrued from tourist nights may surpass 1992's peak level of $2.1 billion.

Going, going...

IT WAS a turbulent year for the privatisation programme, which was plagued by contradictory market signals, mixed investor reactions and inconsistent sel'ing policies.

As the government strived to reconcile its commitment to liberalisation with socio-economic concerns, some analysts, including international financial institutions, argued that privatisation was proceeding slowly, with only 13 public sector companies offering part of their shares.

On the other hand, stock market analysts complained that an increased share supply had inundated the market and caused a decline in share prices.

The market for privatised shares oscillated. At the begining of the year, shares were snapped up and public share offers were oversubscribed, in the case of Alexandria Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries and North Cairo Flour Mills, by 15 times. Second offerings in Al-Nasr Textiles and Cloth (Kabo), Ameriya Cement and Torah Cement were similarly welcomed.

However, the slump in share prices during the summer intimidated investors, and the share offer of Heliopolis for Housing and Development was cancelled for lack of subscribers.

Market mood changed in the autumn, restoring investor confidence. By November, the market was ready to devour 500,000 shares offered by Helwan Cement, which was 12 times oversubscribed.

However, like the past few years, this year witnessed a host of constantly changing privatisation policies. The most controversial method of privatisation — one which triggered a reorganisation of trading systems at the stock exchange — was the auction system applied to the sale of the Eastern Tobacco Company.

Partnership at a price

AFTER four rounds of negotiations, the proposed Egyptian-European Parntership agreement is still bogged down in controversy.

In spite of obvious economic prospects, Egyptian producers understand that the way to Europe will not be paved with gold.

The proposed agreement attempts to move away from the current donor-recepient nature of Egyptian-European relationship to a more equal one. The utlimate objective is the establishment of a free trade area between the two parties.

The agreement is part of an overall European strategy aimed at establishing a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area by the year 2010. However, Egyptian industrialists and agricultural producers held back the champagne. Although they realise that this could be their once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to gain free access to European markets, they could also foresee tough challenges ahead. Higher quality European goods would gain a competitive edge in the Egyptian market as customs tariffs are abolished. Unless Egyptian producers upgrade their products to compete with their European counterparts, they will be forced to close down.

Understanding these fears, the agreement provides for a 12-year transitional period as well as technical and financial assistance.

Producers however, demand more favourable conditions, namely, a 15-year transitional period, ensuring rules of origin, and abolishing trade barriers confronting Egyptian exports of agricultural products and agri-industries.

WALKING a tightrope between the interests of budding local industries and its obligations as a signatory of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Egypt, in 1995, took a gradual approach to trade liberalisation.

Having ratified its membership in the WTO, the government found itself confronted with a bevy of conditions stipulating the reduction of tariff barriers and dismantling non-tariff trade restrictions.

In addition, plans to lower the maximum tariff rate to only 50 per cent by the end of 1995 fell short of the mark. The government announced a 10 per cent tariff cut last July, bringing the maximum tariff rate to 60 per cent. The remaining 10 per cent cut has not yet been approved.

In order to ensure fair competition, the Ministry of Economy established the Foreign Trade Policy Department (FTPD) to help draft anti-dumping and ant-trust laws, and to formulate the regulations preventing other illegal commercial practices by the end of the year, these laws and regulations have yet to materialise.

In light of an international move towards trade liberalisation, Egypt was forced to cut its customs duties by 40 per cent over the last four years. In 1992, a 20 per cent cut in tariffs was announced, bringing down the customs taxes to a maximum of 80 per cent. Another reduction of 10 per cent was approved in 1993.

While many perceived the lowering of tariffs as a step to bring the Egyptian economy in line with the international market, others view the move as being detrimental to local industries. The main fear is that local manufacturers will be confronted with fierce competition from imported products with new access to the Egyptian market. The flip-side of the argument, however, is that with trade becoming increasingly globalised, only an increase in productivity, improved quality and competitive pricing will help Egypt find a leg to stand on in the international trade arena.

Suez fight[illegible]

AN INTERNATIONAL recession and strong competition over the year kept the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) on its toes to entice customers.

The SCA, attempting to increase its competitive edge and maintain its share of oil transport and world trade, found itself involved in a toll war with its major competitor, the Sumed pipeline. This pipeline, which connects the Gulf of Suez to the Mediterranean, charges less than the SCA, thereby reducing the flow of oil through the canal. Also, the rapid move towards peace in the Middle East is believed to expand the use of inter-border pipelines for oil transport.

To keep competitors at bay, the SCA last November, announced a 20 per cent cut in transit tolls collected from oil tankers using the canal. The cut will be effective starting January 1996.

Earlier this year, it declared a $0.70 per tonne discount for 250,000 tonne oil tankers, on the condition that they empty some of their cargo into the Sumed pipeline at Ain Al-Sukhna. This move was designed to enable the tankers, which had previously been too heavy, to pass through the canal.

In another move to attract a greater number of large ships, the SCA worked throughout the year to increase the permissible draught in the canal to 59 feet.

These much-needed measures came at a time when the number of vessels using the canal dropped from 13,550 during the first 10 months of 1994, to 12,530 during the same period in 1995.

Sins of '94

AS THE year came to a close, the capital market got a new boss and computer system, but there was little else to celebrate in a market that has been trying to recover from a steep drop in prices and a consequent lack of investor confidence since the beginning of the year.

The new chairman, Abdel-Hamid Ibrahim, ushered in a new system of trading and regulated the system by which shares of privatised companies were being offered at the stock exchange. But he was not able to return last year's smiles to the faces of brokers and small investors, who, before October 1994, had been basking in the revival of the market, and profiting from the short supply of shares which pushed prices to new heights.

In 1995, the market paid dearly for the previous year's speculation, but despite a sleepy summer, the government continued to pump new privatised shares into the market, causing prices to slip further.

Although the five mutual funds, established over the year, soaked up the supply of privatised shares, their performance was hit by a sluggish market which pushed their returns down below bank interest rates.

By autumn, market activity was beginning to pick up and the upward trend, albeit slow, raised hopes that perhaps 1996 would be better.

[illegible]lues

FOR THE second season in a row, cotton missed the call for liberalisation. A bad crop forced the government to set price limits to support farmers and ban exports and imports of raw cotton to protect the price of the local crop. Market players complain that this intervention has disrupted the market and put spinners, weavers and garment manufacturers in a no-win situation.

In an attempt to compensate farmers for the low crop, the government set a minimum price of LE500 per qantar — a price much higher than international levels, which were reduced by bumper crops in Pakistan and India.

Local spinning mills were forced to buy the overpriced lint cotton. After turning it into yarn, they found it had become too expensive for both the price-conscious export market and the local weaving companies.

In the meantime, private sector garment manufacturers decided to cut their losses by importing cotton textiles. Public sector garment manufacturers, however, will be forced to buy the local material. This does not bode well for a market already in recession, and experts warn that low production and high prices have eroded Egypt's share in world cotton markets.

As the government grapples with cotton traders and industries over the crisis, the liberalisation of the cotton market has not materialised and the cotton bourse in Alexandria remains inactive.

Tra[illegible]he red

A RAPIDLY increasing balance of trade deficit topped $7.85 billion in the fiscal year 1994-1995, eclipsing four years of monetary and fiscal gains relected in a stable exchange rate, lower inflation and a decrease in budget deficit. The deficit stood at only $7.538 billion in fiscal year 1990-1991, the beginning of Egypt's reform programme.

This year's deficit occured despite a 48 per cent increase in exports. However, a 20 per cent increase in imports offset the export gains.

The deficit in the trade balance threatens to strain the balance of payments, pushing it once more into the red, which, in turn, would exert a downward pressure on the Egyptian pound.

But revenues from the trade of services, including Suez Canal toll revenues, expatriate workers' remittances, and proceeds of the tourist industry, coupled with a reduction in Egypt's debt service, have helped push the balance of payments into a surplus over the past four years.

Despite the gains made, however, Egypt's current major foreign currency earners are highly vulnerable.

Is there a remedy? The one at hand is to encourage commodity exports, which represent a more stable form of foreign currency revenue. However, this move hinges on Egypt's ability to upgrade its production sector, enabling it to meet the needs of local consumers and produce a competitive surplus for export.

[illegible] waiting

A LONG list of necessary yet controversial bills, aiming to replace regulations inherited from the sixties' socialist regime, failed to make it through parliament this year.

Various new bills were delayed at different stages, as interest groups argued over the letter and principle of the legislation. They include bills governing tenant-landlord relationships, labour conditions, the structure of chambers of commerce, as well as investment laws, anti-dumping and anti-trust laws.

The most controversial was the draft housing law, which would significantly raise rents in newly-built apartment blocks if passed. Opponents argued that an increase in rents would negatively affect the lives of middle-class families, while the government maintained that the raising of rents would lead to the leasing of two million empty flats in new buildings in Cairo.

A prospective new labour law was also the subject of controversy, with opponents insisting that the new law would give more power to employers, while depriving employees of job security. Advocates of the new law, which would include performance-related pay, argued that it would enhance productivity.

Legislation granting chambers of commerce the powers of a supervisory body was criticised by some businessmen, who are opposed to chambers having an increased influence over the market. Chamber leaders, on the other hand, argued that a wider role would enable them to exercise control over the quality of consumer goods.

A draft investment law, aimed at changing the structure of tax incentives granted to investors and introducing a new system for the establishment of new companies, was rejected by most businessmen. They contend that the suggested tax structure would leave investors prey to bureaucracy. Officials, however, insisted that a unified investment law and taxation system are needed to streamline investment procedures.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Conditional peace

Arafat may have survived the limitations of self-rule, but what are the prospects for Palestinian self-determination, asks **Graham Usher** in Jerusalem



As Palestinians celebrated Christmas in Bethlehem, land near the West Bank town of Ramallah is confiscated for the building of a bypass road for Israeli settlers. One woman protests to an Israeli soldier who tries to silence her *(photo: Reuters)*

Twelve months ago Yasser Arafat and his Palestinian National Authority (PNA) appeared to be on the brink of collapse. Confined to Gaza and Jericho and confronted with a security-obsessed Israeli government that had suspended Oslo's *original timetable* until the PNA "took care of terror", the only leverage Arafat commanded was an ever more ruthless adoption of Israel's security agenda *for self-rule*.

Yet the more the PLO leader wielded the stick against Oslo's Palestinian dissidents the greater was his and Oslo's loss of legitimacy on the Palestinian street. It was a crisis that reached its tragic zenith in Gaza on 18 November 1994 when PNA police shot dead 13 Palestinians in the worst day of clashes in 27 years of occupation. Twelve months ago, the question was not when would Arafat get to the West Bank; it was rather how long was he going to survive in Gaza and Jericho.

A year on, Arafat has survived, and with interest. Last week, a poll published by the Nablus Palestinian Centre for Research and Studies recorded a colossal 72 per cent support among Palestinians for the Oslo II agreement signed in Washington last September. 68 per cent said they would vote for Arafat for president. Arafat formally declared himself for the post during his triumphant return to Nablus on 15 December. His closest rival was the imprisoned Hamas leader, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, who polled 12 per cent. 55 per cent said they would support candidates from Arafat's Fatah movement; 10 per cent for Hamas (the Islamists' lowest rating since the Oslo accords were signed in 1993); and less than 4 per cent for the PLO's main Oslo rejectionists, the Popular and Democratic Fronts.

Such results are reflected in the enthusiasm with which most Palestinians are participating in their first "national" suffrage for the 83-member Palestinian Council to be *held on 20 January*. According to the PNA's newly appointed Central Elections Commission, over one million Palestinians of the 1.2 million eligible to vote have registered on the electoral roll.

Scores of Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem have nominated themselves as "independent" candidates. Arafat even has a rival for the presidency — Palestine National Council member and head of the Ramallah *Inaash Al-Usra* Charity, Samiha Khalil, whose main platform, she says, is "freedom for Palestinian prisoners."

Added to which, Israel's redeployment is moving ahead at speed and on schedule. The Israeli Defence Force's evacuation from Bethlehem city centre on 21 December amid thousands of cheering Palestinians was testimony to both the PNA and Israel's security coordination and to Palestinians' collective self-discipline.

All of this is good news for Arafat. "We should be proud of the (upcoming) Palestinian elections," he cried to the 10,00 strong crowd in Bethlehem's Manger Square on 23 December. "They are the door leading to the construction of a Palestinian state."

The elections and redeployment in the West Bank have certainly made the Oslo-inspired peace process irreversible. *But whether either* will bring the Palestinians any closer to their national aims of authentic self-determination and return remains an open question. The prospects for the PNA's future are nowhere near as rosy as its present.

In getting to the West Bank — i.e. in signing the Oslo II agreement — Arafat was forced to make truly monumental territorial concessions to the Israelis. The PNA currently has limited authority over just 27 per cent of the West Bank; but it has territorial jurisdiction over only four per cent — the six main West Bank cities, excluding Jerusalem and Hebron.

Oslo II allows for further transfers of territory to the PNA *at six monthly intervals*. But these are conditional on the PNA meeting Israel's security concerns, and can be halted if Israel perceives any infringement. The depth of the PNA's territory is thus directly related to the extent that it protects Israel's security, including the "personal security" of the 130,000 Jewish settlers who currently (and illegally) reside in the West Bank and Gaza. This augurs a self rule for the West Bank every bit as security driven — and abusive of Palestinian human rights — as was its Gaza and Jericho precursor.

Furthermore, there is the economic cost to the PNA of maintaining such a disproportionate emphasis on (Israel's) security. According to PNA Police Chief Nasser Yusuf, the PNA will have a police force of around 28,000-30,000 during the interim period. The World Bank estimates the annual budget of a security force of this size to be around $500 million.

In addition, the PNA has to pay the salaries of around 27,000 public employees as well as run much needed social services such as health, education and social welfare. The *idea that the PNA will be able* to cover these expenses out of locally generated revenue is wholly imaginary. The PNA's current financial deficit is $150 million, despite considerable improvement over the last year in tax administration and collection.

Rather, what such an inflated public sector actually portends is a Palestinian economy that stays dependent on and politically conditioned by donor money. In the longer term — once "donor fatigue" starts to sink in — the prospects are of protracted and endemic crisis, in which case a police force of 30,000 will be required not to "develop" a Palestinian society towards statehood, but rather to keep the lid on the society in the absence of such development.

Finally, there remains the question of Oslo's legitimacy and the representativeness of the PNA. Arafat has, for now, managed to carry most Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza with him in his "fateful gamble" on the Oslo peace process. But these Palestinians comprise a minority of the Palestinian nation. Over three million — including 1.8 million refugees — remain stranded *and effectively* unrepresented in the diaspora. Part of Arafat's failure to lure Hamas and the Popular and Democratic Fronts into the PNA's electoral process was due to resistance on the part of their "outside" leaderships who view any endorsement of Oslo as an abandonment of Palestine's external refugee constituency.

But unless this constituency's right of return is addressed — along with the issues of settlements, borders and Jerusalem — in the upcoming final status talks due to start in May 1996, Arafat may find that, while the Oslo process is indeed irreversible, the precarious "peace" it has brought is not.

Getting it together

It could not happen, they said. But elections went ahead in war-torn Algeria. **Amira Howeidy** casts an eye over the major events in a turbulent twelve months

It has been a hard year for Algerians. There were some hopeful signs that the country was trying to pull itself out of the three years of violence and despair, but the death toll continued to rise. It now stands at 60,000 victims since the state of insurgency broke out in 1992.

Two events in particular stand out: the Rome conference in January and the presidential elections in November. After a preparatory conference twelve months earlier, Algeria's seven opposition parties met again on 13 January of this year.

The conference concluded with a joint statement offering a solution for the current crisis. The "National Charter" called for a return to the constitution, the non-interference of the army in political affairs and the abrogation of the decision to ban the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), in addition to the release of all imprisoned FIS members and recognition of the Algerian identity as Arab, Islamic and Amazeghan.

The Rome II conference was held after the failure of three previous rounds of the "National Dialogue" between the government and the opposition parties, including an unofficial dialogue with leading members of the FIS. The charter's achievement in the political *arena was that, for the first* time, the opposition nationalist and Islamic parties reached a consensus on a way out of the current crisis. Their united front also clearly embarrassed the government.

Their demands, however, were rejected by President Lamine Zeroual and the government-controlled media which described the participants as traitors. The conference was quickly followed by Zeroual's first call for presidential elections before the end of '95. Although Zeroual had not yet decided to contest the elections himself, his proposal was rejected by the main opposition parties which said they would only accept a comprehensive, and not a partial solution, to the crisis.

The former ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), FIS *and other* opposition parties called for a boycott of the presidential elections. Unofficially, however, many of them expressed their doubts that there would be any elections at all. How, after all, could Zeroual hold elections in the midst of a vicious cycle of violence which even the state's strongest security measures had failed to contain?

But the election preparations went ahead. In mid '95, Zeroual announced his decision to stand in the elections, winning the discreet approval of even some opposition elements who boycotted the elections. As the date for the elections was announced, another 18 candidates applied for nomination but only four met the criteria laid down by the new electoral rules. These included collecting at least 75,000 signatures for each nomination and marriage to an Algerian spouse — a stipulation which excluded Abdel-Hamid Mehri, leader of the National Liberation Front (FLN) who is married to a Syrian, and Ahmed Taleb Al-Ibrahimi, the minister of foreign affairs, whose wife is French.

Mehri and Al-Ibrahimi may have represented a serious threat to Zeroual had they contested the elections. As it were, the elections went ahead on 16 November with the four eligible candidates. Challenging the incumbent president were Mahfouz Nehnah, leader of the Islamic Hamas Party, Said Saadi, leader of the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), and Nour Eddin Boukrouh, leader of the moderate Islamic Al-Tajdid Party.

The four candidates represented most of the major currents in Algerian society. Zeroual was backed by the army *and government institutions*, Nehnah represented the Islamic trend, Saadi the hardline secularists and Boukrouh the moderate national-Islamists.

Although the results of the elections came as no surprise, the electoral process itself was remarkable; not one single victim fell despite warnings by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) to "turn the ballot boxes into coffins". There were no accusations of rigging in any of the polling stations and there was a high turn-out (60 per cent of the registered voters) despite the call by some of the opposition parties for a boycott of the elections. As for the size of the winning candidate's majority, this provided perhaps the greatest surprise. In a region used to incumbent presidents winning 99.9 per cent of the votes, Zeroual received a *modest 60 per cent* while opposition candidate Nehnah received a comfortable slice of the cake with 25 per cent of the vote.

Zeroual is now the elected rather than the appointed president. As such he may be tied to his promises of holding local and parliamentary elections in the first months of 1996. But while he can claim support from all sides, some observers warn that this may not last for long. Zeroual won political legitimacy through the elections but he may suffer from the backlash stirred up by the implementation of the IMF agreement with Algeria. Its prescriptions for Algeria's economic ills include the devaluation of the Algerian currency by up to 40 per cent and an unwelcome 25 per cent rise in the price of government-subsidised bread.

On the political front, he has to settle the two-year old dialogue with FIS leaders if he intends to hold parliamentary elections next year. For their part, the FIS announced that they will not impose any conditions on holding a dialogue with Zeroual. National legislative elections, if they are held, will no doubt be the big issue for Algerians in 1996.

Optimists in Algeria have stressed that '95 was the year of positive action on the part of both the opposition and the government. Just how positive that action was will be seen in '96.

Highlights of '95

A shot in the heart

AT A TEL Aviv peace rally on 4 November two bullets rang out, puncturing the body of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. But it was not the assassination itself that provided the greatest shock: it was the fact that it was a Jew who pulled the trigger. In firing at the Israeli leader the assassin, a radical religious Jew, pierced the protective armour of national solidarity which Israelis had prided themselves on. It also exposed a side of Israeli society which had hitherto escaped the attention of the world's media. Israel too had its religious extremists.

Defection days

A CAVALCADE of cars across the desert led to speculation over the future of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in August of this year.

Lt Gen Hussein Kamel Al-Majid, former head of Iraq's military programme, his brother and their wives, both *daughters of Saddam Hussein, fled to Jordan where* King Hussein granted the foursome political asylum. Meanwhile, the United Nations quickly dispatched officials to Amman in hopes that Al-Majid, considered the mastermind behind Baghdad's missile programme, would divulge precious secrets.

The loss of four leading figures in the closely knit Iraqi regime dramatically highlighted divisions in the country's ruling elite. Political observers alleged that the UN sanctions were further dividing the Iraqi elite, a recipe for the overthrow of the Iraqi leader.

Media predictions, however, underestimated the tenacious grip on power of the Iraqi president. Saddam's response was to place the blame for the lack of cooperation with the UN special committee for the disarming of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction on his old second in command, Al-Majid. Iraq, he pledged, would henceforth work with the UN to honour all the terms of the 1991 Gulf War ceasefire.

A 99.96 vote in a national referendum over whether he should stay on president served as a reminder to pundits that Saddam Hussein intends to stick around.

Ever homeless

COLONEL Gadaffi's decision to expel 30,000 Palestinians from Libya plunged thousands of Palestinians *into fresh misery*.

In a speech made on 1 September the Libyan leader set out to prove the hollowness of the PLO-Israeli peace accords. If there is peace, he argued, then let them go home. But according to the Oslo agreements it is Israel, not the PLO, which controls the borders to the self-rule areas, and only 1967 refugees with the correct Israeli-issued identity papers were allowed back.

Observers questioned, however, whether the expulsions were motivated simply as a protest against the peace process. Some suggested that trouble at home — clashes between the police and Islamists in Benghazi and the tightening grip of UN air sanctions for Libya's alleged involvement in the Lockerbie crisis — may also have been a factor.

Whatever lay behind the decision, the result was the same. Teachers, engineers, doctors — many of whom had spent a decade or more in Libya — suddenly found themselves no longer welcome. Some of then ended up at Salloum, a barren stretch of land on the Egyptian-Libyan border.

Stranded and once again stateless, the refugees set up a makeshift camp, euphemistically labelled the "Camp of Return". There are still 200 Palestinians stuck at Salloum, unable to go back to their jobs and homes in Libya or lacking the residency papers needed to join their families in Egypt. The fear is that 1996 may bring a fresh wave of expulsions as the deadline for the departure of the 17,000 Palestinians left in Libya runs out.

An iron hand

TURKEY went to war with Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq in March of this year. Around 35,000 Turkish troops poured across the border in what Ankara labelled its "iron operation" against the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK).

Infighting between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan had led to a breakdown of authority in the "safe haven" areas set up after the Gulf War in northern Iraq, charged the Turkish government. Military action was, therefore, necessary to deter the PKK from launching guerrilla operations from the region.

Yet some observers noted that the widespread approval for the strong stand taken by Prime Minister Tansu Ciller came at an opportune moment for the beleaguered coalition government. High inflation, increasing unemployment and an IMF-backed privatisation programme has provoked large-scale social and economic unrest throughout 1995.

On the political front, the state's secular ethos has also come under pressure from resurgent political Islam. Some analysts saw the offensive, and the government's support for the generals' strategy, as an indicator that the military wants to reassert itself in the political life of Turkey.

Up in arms

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, 178 countries signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the world's main pact against the spread of nuclear arms. In April a month-long conference was convened to review and extend the treaty's provisions. During the months leading up to the conference, four of the world's five declared nuclear powers (France, US, Britain, Russia, and China) mounted pressure on non-nuclear states to renew their signatures for an indefinite NPT extension.

The NPT conference pitted Third World nations, which criticised the treaty's provisions for failing to provide adequate security reassurances, against the US-led drive to gain an unconditional renewal. As regional leaders called for a nuclear-free Middle East, Israel locked the door to its reported 200-strong arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Israel's refusal to sign the treaty, with full backing from the *US*, prompted neighbouring countries to demand that Israel commit to signing the international convention as well as allow an international team to inspect their arsenal before they renewed their signatures. In the end, however, US pressure won the day and the treaty *was signed* by all.

Compiled by ***Julie Till*** *and* ***Jihan Ammar***

That's all folks!

By Eqbal Ahmad

As I readied myself one morning 24 years ago to give my maiden briefing to a small group of American senators, Mark Raskin and Richard Barnet, then co-directors of the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), walked into my office, looking anxious and ill at ease. I had just joined IPS and this was to be my first private briefing to influential liberal senators including Frank Church and George McGovern. They wanted to hear my assessment of the "strategic design" then being articulated by Richard Nixon and his special assistant for national security, Henry Kissinger.

Former aides of President John F Kennedy and veterans of Capitol Hill, Mark and Dick attached great importance to this briefing, and were worried that my professorial style might ruin its purpose. War in Indo-China was still raging: after a season of secret bombings orchestrated by Kissinger, Cambodia had been invaded. Kissinger and Nixon had launched the Nixon Doctrine which would promote neo-fascist regimes in the "Third World", and of which the Middle East was targeted to be the centrepiece. It would be a shame, they said, to miss this opportunity to alert the senators of the impending disasters. "Please don't lecture them," said Mark. "They aren't used to exposition."

"Lay down conclusions; deliver punchlines," said Dick. The attention span of American legislators, was, be advised, very short. "Summarise, summarise. No more than five minutes on *Vietnam, five on the counter force. Okay,* take six on the Middle East." All the facts and analysis I had ordered in my head turned into a jumble of sound bites.

I was reminded of that incident by the arrival of a packet of mail, the like of which periodically makes its way from the United States. It included a "Worldwide Threat Briefing" given by Dr Joseph Nye Jr, chairman of the National Intelligence Council to the House Armed Services Committee. Seventeen pages in bold type of greatly enlarged letters, prepared as though for the hopelessly short-sighted, offer a model of summarisation — the ultimate congressional briefing. It does, nevertheless, serve as a good slide show on the outlook of American policy makers. It is reproduced here in full and without comment:

Purpose
Review current and regional instabilities and conflict. Project *possible future regional conflicts. Assess "low order" threats.* Survey proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Bottom line: Capabilities constrained, but not eliminated, as long as sanctions in place and working.

Hostile with capability: Iran
Threats and concerns: Regional hegemony/oil SLOCS. Support to terrorism. Exporting radicalism. Steady growth of conventional capabilities. WMD programme.

Bottom line: Expanding threat to US regional interests.

Strategies for coping with US conventional power: Hardening and concealment of fixed facilities. Mobile missiles (ballistic and cruise). Acquire/counter advanced conventional weapons (ATW). Erode potential coalition.

Bottom line: Complicate US operations and increase US casualties.

Other hostile states
Libya: Support to terrorists/long-range missile threat. Cuba: Refugee potential/acts of desperation. Sudan: Safe haven for terrorists and extremists/focal point for Iran's subversive activities.

Bottom line: Limited capabilities for attacking US forces.

Armed groups hostile to US
Examples: Anti-US terrorists: Undermine and attack US interests. Drug cartels: Increasing sophistication and organisation.

Bottom line: Limited capabilities now but future potential of grave concern.

Terrorism
Sources of instability: Renegades (Korea, Iran, Iraq). Proliferation of WMD and ACW. Ethnic, religious, nationalistic conflict. Social issues — economic, humanitarian, environmental.

Bottom line: Dramatic change in every region where US retains vital interests.

Hostile states
North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Cuba.

Hostile with capability: North Korea
Threats and concerns: Nuclear concern. War preparation plan. Weapons proliferation. Regime succession. Worsening economy. State-sponsored terrorism.

Bottom line: *War neither imminent nor inevitable...* but bears constant scrutiny.

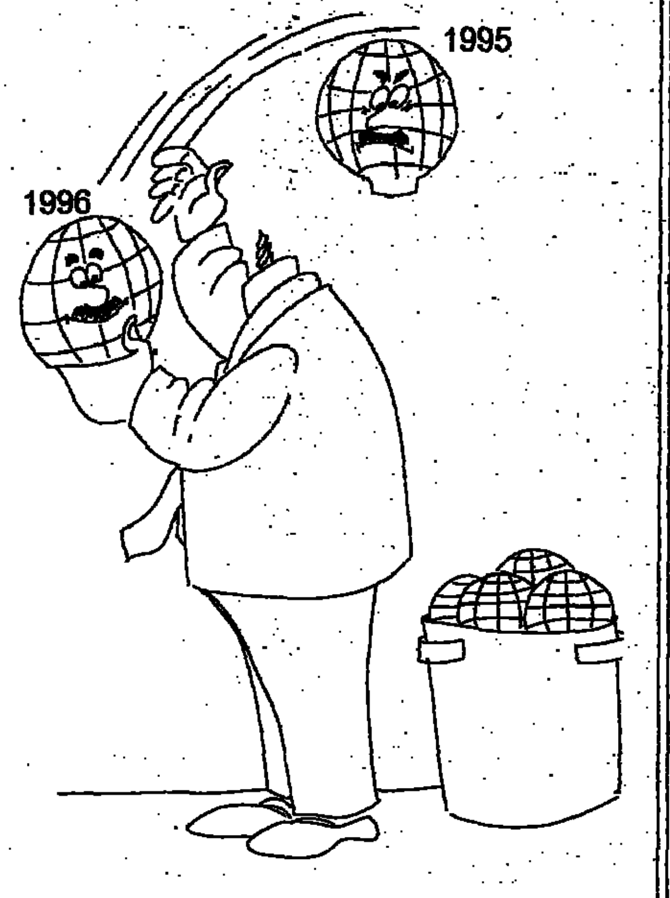
Hostile with capability: Iraq
Threats and concerns: Regional hegemony. Control of oil-producing states. Seeking power projection and WMD capabilities. State-sponsored terrorism.

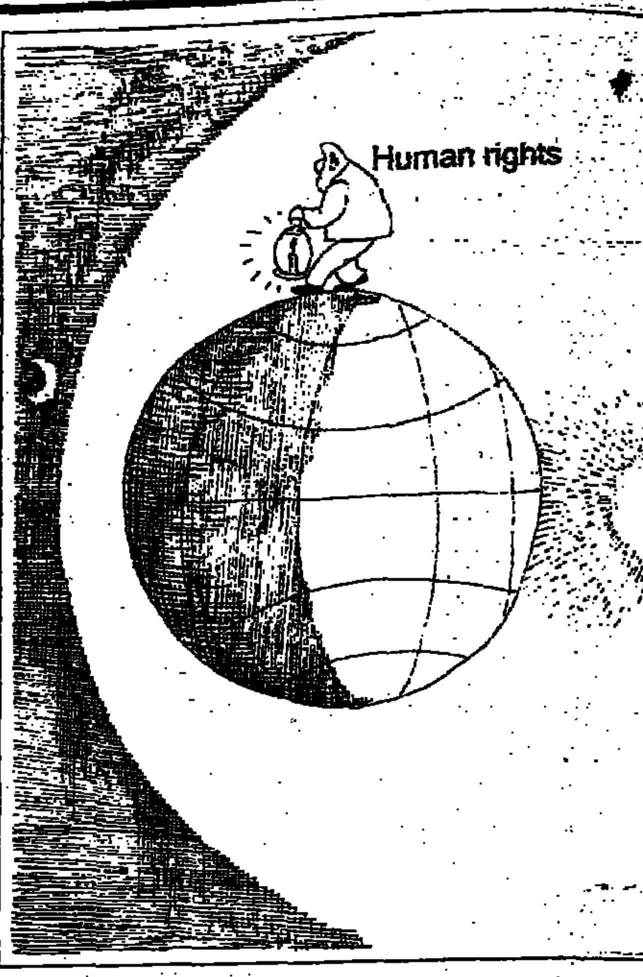
Current incidence lower than 10 years ago, but rose last year. End of Cold War reduced support, but: root causes remain; ethnic and separatist strife exacerbates. Potential to harness WMD — particularly biological weapons (BW) — is a grave concern.

Would hostile states or groups act together?
No evidence of integrated military planning or exercises. Coincidence of interests always possible. Radicals and terrorists supported by state sponsors.

That's all folks.







Living an elusive dream

The dream of racial harmony is as elusive as ever. The America of 1995 was as engulfed in racial conflict as it ever was, writes **David Du Bois**

The United States military services and particularly *the army, together with the Federal* Civil Service, are by far the most racially integrated institutions in America. Consequently, the recent order for an investigation into the nature and the extent of white supremacist, Nazi-style formations within or associated with the US armed services exposes the degree to which US society has failed to face up to and defeat white racism and the feelings and attitudes of white superiority. The investigation was prompted by the recent unprovoked, drive-by murder of a black couple by three white soldiers in North Carolina. In the room of one of the soldiers white supremacist literature and Hitler-style Nazi emblems and paraphernalia were found.

Three events in 1995 are instructive: the trial and reactions to the O J Simpson "not guilty" verdict; the Million Man March on Washington DC called by Muslim convert Minister Louis Farrakhan; the brouhaha that swept political circles around the country at the prospect of a presidential bid by retired General Colin Powell, an African American.

The difference between black and white reactions to the *O J* Simpson verdict was dramatic. Blacks generally, and black women in particular, were overjoyed, while the vast majority of white Americans were not only shocked and unbelieving, *but were* openly bitter and resentful at the predominantly black and predominantly female jury. Convinced in overwhelming numbers from before the trial opened *that O J was guilty, whites attacked the jury of* 12 (with three non-blacks and two men) for its stupidity and its emotional, pro-black bias. This reaction allowed little or no consideration of *the shaky evidence and the questionable means* by which it was gathered and handled; the documented, anti-black racism of the chief prosecution witness, police officer Mark Fuhrman; the discrepancy of the nurses' testimony about the quantity of blood taken from O J and the time frame given O J to return home from the extremely bloody murders of two people and, in six minutes, appear unruffled and spotless to take the limousine to the airport.

But more importantly, in many cases white reaction challenged two basic tenets of the US *justice system: a defendant is presumed* innocent until proved guilty "beyond reasonable doubt" and jury unanimity. From respectable quarters across the land have come calls for reconsideration of the "reasonable doubt" principle and jury decision by a specified number of the 12 jurors, threatening the traditional basis of defendants' rights.

There continues to be debate throughout America, among blacks and whites, over whether O J Simpson committed the murders. But what most concerns black Americans is the white racist and sexist viciousness, and the extent of that viciousness, in press, TV and radio commentary condemning the jury. Alexander Cockburn, long-time media critic of the progressive weekly *The Nation*, in his 30 October column that he entitled "White Rage: The Press and the Verdict", wrote: "it's been a shameful couple of weeks in about 99.9 per cent of the white commentary on the verdict of O J Simpson's jury." That commentary reflected what the polls of whites indicated overwhelmingly before and throughout the trial — Simpson's guilt — and what most whites felt but only expressed privately — the jury's intellectual inability to deal with the scientific evidence provided by the prosecution together with its assumed pro-black, anti-white "feminine" emotionalism.

The Million Man March of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, coming in the midst of reaction to the O J verdict, muted some of the more *rabid* public *white commentary on* that verdict. But it has not gone away. Officially now, the number of participants in the Million Man March stands at well over 800,000, double *the original Washington DC Park Department* estimate of 400,000. The Nation of Islam and its supporters insist the number was well over one million. The estimate of 400,000 was accepted and repeated by the media without question until it was threatened with a legal challenge by Farrakhan's people. This makes the Farrakhan march at least three times larger than the famous Martin Luther King-led March on Washington in 1963.

The controversy over Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam notwithstanding, white America was jolted by the turn-out, the spiritual tone and the uninhibited expressions of love and unity that characterised the march. White America was also just a little intimidated. Blacks coming together without whites has always been intimidating to whites. This has been true since the days of slavery. The fear was and is that they are conspiring — against whom else but whites. To bring one million black men together in Washington DC from every corner of America, no matter who the organiser, at the same time as the nation is making a determined thrust to the political right — ending affirmative action and attacking the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, throwing the needy off welfare, building prisons rather than drug clinics and schools, raising the cost of health care for the poor and elderly while giving tax breaks to the corporations — is an unwelcome challenge to the current direction of both political parties. This explains the media switch from hostile attack before the march to sympathetic near praise following it.

The Million Man March included, with its message of atonement, accepting personal and family responsibility, respecting women and caring for children, economic and political empowerment, grassroots organising, registering to vote and voting. It spoke to and for all the nation's poor, as well as its debt-ridden, insecure working and middle classes, marginalised women and its growing communities of colour. The tragedy *is that white racism makes the nations'* non-black masses deaf and dumb to the black voice and the black example.

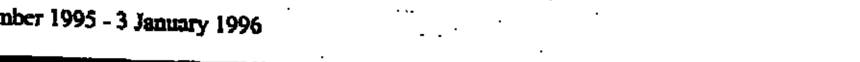
In what *The New Yorker* magazine called an *"epochal event"* (20 November 1995), retired General Colin Powell announced to a massive press conference, carried live and in its entirety by CNN and all the networks, that he would not run as a Republican candidate for the presidency in 1996. Indeed, the entire political establishment held its breath at the prospect and breathed a great sigh of relief with his announcement. If Powell had decided to make a bid for the Republican Party nomination the party would have been irreparably split between its moderate and radical right, with the moderate right prevailing and the party seriously weakened. The Democratic Party would have looked forward to losing one of its main voting constituencies, blacks, seriously jeopardising Bill Clinton's chances of re-election in 1996. The likelihood of an independent third party or even fourth would have been greatly increased, something neither the Republicans nor the Democrats want. A Powell bid for the presidency would have radically altered the dynamics of the 1996 campaign.

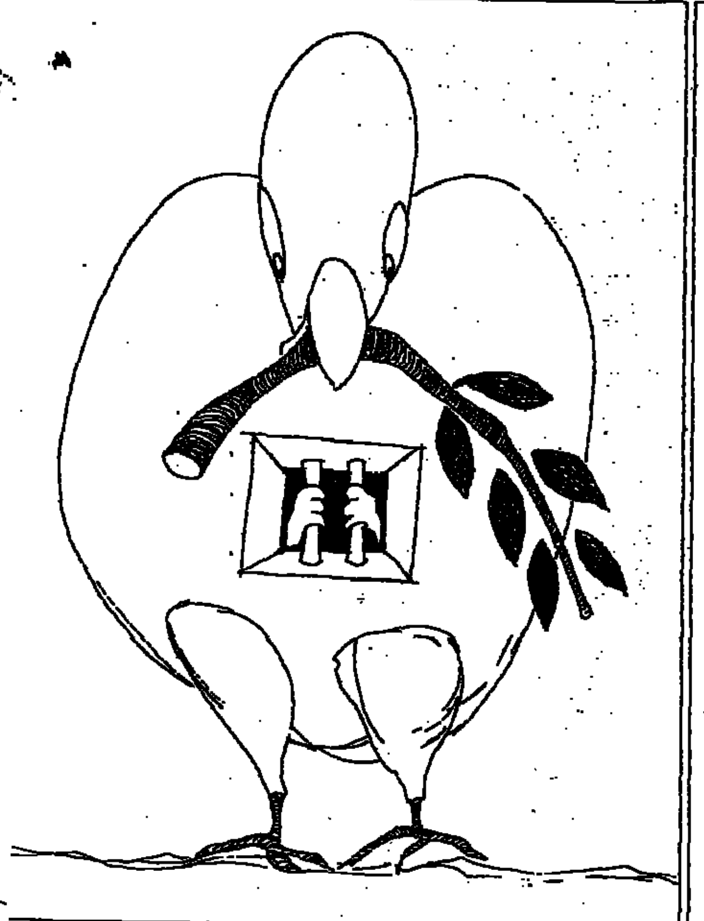
It is anybody's guess how many of the one million black men responding to Louis Farrakhan's call also believe, like Farrakhan, that separation from white society is the solution to the black-white problem. But Colin Powell "proudly identifies with the integrationist vision" asserts *Washington Post* columnist and political pundit Charles Krauthammer, writing before Powell's press conference. That is why Krauthammer, who supports the "Republican revolution" being led by Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, writes that he "would seriously consider voting for Powell for president" and urges other Republications to do likewise. Krauthammer's column, reprinted in the *Guardian Weekly* of 22 October, had the heading "How a Powell presidency would heal racial wounds", which reflects the thrust of his piece. It also reflects Krauthammer's refusal to admit or inability to recognise the real depth of the racial wounds afflicting the country and his adherence to the most superficial of false solutions.

Columnist A M Rosenthal, writing in the *New York Times* of 10 November, says, "Powell made five grievous errors during his press *conference... He was graceful, decisive,* courteous, warm, also candid. For exhibiting those characteristics, the Washington political industry will not forgive him. Taken together they [the characteristics] are a portrait of what Americans dearly desire in a President, but which does not exactly fit any of the major candidates selected by the industry" for the 1996 presidential race.

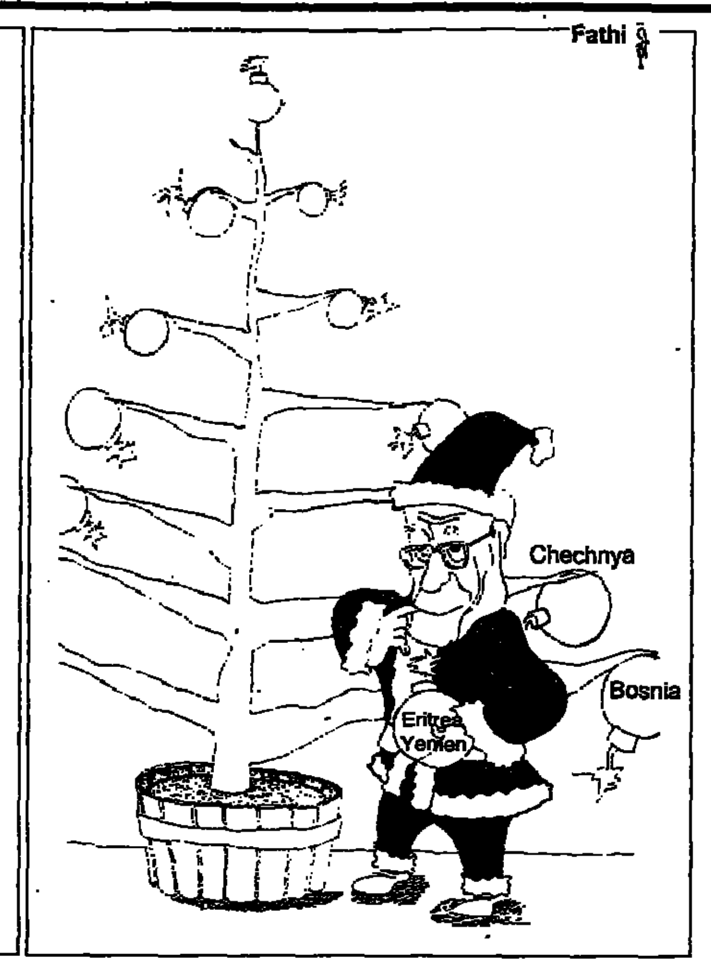
Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

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Rights under fire

In 1995 the stage was set for both massive violations of human rights and more subtle ones. **Rachad Antonius** reviews the year's bitter harvest

Has the year 1995 witnessed an improvement or worsening of the human rights situation across the world? I am afraid it is not possible to provide a simple and direct answer to this question. It is impossible to quantify the gross violations that occur in different places in the world, as many facets of such violations are simply unknown. We believe, though, that situations where gross violations occur are on the increase and are likely to increase even more. The world order is going through a fundamental transition, and for the time being it looks more like disorder than order. In this situation, the legitimacy of existing powers — either international or national — is questioned, and conflicts tend to be resolved by violent means.

The latest US State Department's Report on Human Rights identifies, *however, two contradictory trends.* On the one hand, violations continue to be the general rule, but the report *also notes a trend towards reconciliation in protracted conflicts,* such as in Bosnia, Palestine and Ireland, a reconciliation that puts an end to situations of gross human rights violations. We do not share this view, as in many other places conflicts develop. Moreover, the peaceful trend identified by the report far from guarantees respect for human rights. The Israeli-Palestinian accord, for instance, does not restore basic rights to the Palestinians.

The most important source of violations has been armed conflicts involving civilians. In these cases, we can speak of "wholesale" violations of human rights, since large numbers of people are subjected to direct violence and coercion (sometimes also to killings and rape); their properties are lost, and they lose their means of livelihood.

Many of these conflicts have an ethnic dimension. Specialists counted over 40 such conflicts in 1995. These conflicts have been responsible for the bulk of the flow of refugees. At the *beginning of 1995, there were close to* 25 million refugees worldwide, a little less than half the entire population of *Egypt. Most of these people had left* their homes against their will and had been subjected to all kinds of violence *by hostile armed groups or by governments.*

Then there are violations associated with political conflict, committed either by states or by political groups who challenge the state. There are no global statistics on such violence; neither the US Department of State Report on Human Rights nor the latest report of Amnesty International contains any such statistics. But this kind of violations is not on the decrease. People are killed because of their ideas, or are prevented from exercising their right to free speech and to political organisation, sometimes through imprisonment with or without trials.

Journalists have been important victims of political violence. In 1995, at least 50 journalists have been killed for writing analyses or opinions that are not "approved", and the death of another 20 *may be due to the same* reasons, according to the association Reporters Without Frontiers, which is *investigating their cases.*

In all cases where violence is used, women have been subjected to specific *violations of their fundamental rights:* In every armed conflict women are raped, killed and mutilated. That situa*tion may not be worse than in the past,* but it has been identified as a specific problem that deserves more attention.

The trend towards democratisation that is perceptible worldwide is not a sufficient answer to this problem. On the one hand, it does not affect all regions equally, and, in our part of the world, its effects are more cosmetic than real. However, when democratisation is not accompanied by means to resolve conflicts peacefully, it unleashes social forces that cause even more violations of human rights, as can be seen in the former Soviet bloc.

Human rights activists sometimes forget to mention basic socio-economic rights. These rights are already denied to a large proportion of people in the Third World. But the situation may become worse as struc*tural adjustment programmes are* imposed on Third World countries. Most of the time, these programmes *increase social inequality and economic* polarisation between the haves and the have-nots. If we take *into consideration the International* Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, we must conclude *that structural adjustment* programmes are a threat to human rights.

General awareness of these issues has been largely the result of the grassroot movements that have sprung in many countries. More and more, governments try to curb the efficiency of such organisations by repressing them and denying them official permits. In other cases, fraud within these organisations has weakened them from within. In Western media, a very selective use of their reports also permits a manipulation of public opinion. For instance, a country whose economic or political behaviour disturbs the dominant international forces is put in the spotlight for its violations of human rights, while violations by "friendly" states are glossed over — a flagrant *example of that situation is provided* by the reports of Iraqi and Turkish bombing of Kurdish villages. Those *who believe in human rights must* thus display a massive dose of optimism, and continue to monitor the *situation and to speak out* loud as much as they can. Their work may not be sufficient to bring about an *improvement of human rights condi*tions worldwide, but it is certainly a necessary one.

Markets with a temperament

Mexico 1995 was a humbling insight for overzealous proponents of the free market in the Third World, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

It is ironic, but sometimes the unfettered adoption of free market mechanisms seems to be an extremely constricting ideology. Mexico 1995 kept the Third World wondering if the free market works at all. Many wondered if the Mexican association with American capital was the kiss of death, or if it was the godsend that must catapult the country into 1996 and escort it to an economic comeback? For the South, Mexico 1995 was a sobering experience.

Even the more successful market economies of Asia marvelled at the mercurial temperament of the free market. The Bretton Woods institutions — the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank — were incapable of coming to the rescue; only the United States could obliterate the danger of default on Mexico's debt and reassure credit seekers. Lowering its right foot and speeding away from the poverty of the past to the promised Eldorado, Mexico reached out to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and America brokered a $50 billion international bailout.

So when, last October, US President Bill Clinton hailed the $700 million cheque Mexican President Zedillo brought as part payment of the $12.5 billion Mexico had borrowed from the US, the South *watched* in bewilderment. Yes, the peso's devaluation boosted Mexican exports to the US which rose by 30 per cent to *a record $35 billion.* But Mexico's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth dropped from 3.5 per cent in 1993 to minus 5.0 per cent in 1995. Unemployment soared *from two per cent in* 1991 and three per cent in 1993 to seven per cent in 1995. Foreign investment plummeted from $8 billion in 1993 to *less than $3 billion* in 1995. All knew that the Mexican economy had gone into crisis partially due to the massive withdrawals of US funds from Mexico, attracted to higher American interest rates.

The common-denominator of the developing countries of the South — including Mexico — is low income. Mexico is a low-income country with a *Gross National Product* (GNP) per capita of $3,370 — on par with South Africa's ($3,370). Only a decade ago Mexico had, at $2,080, a GNP per capita *comparable to that of* Malaysia (then $2,000, now $4,260), Brazil (then $1,640 and now $5,230) and South Korea ($2,150 in 1985 and now *$11,580). So, being* more deeply involved with American capital is no panacea to the South's many ills.

Malaysia — home to South East Asia's largest stock market — launched a stock-index futures contract last week. The contract, pegged on the blue-chip Kuala Lumpur Composite Index was the first of its kind in the Association *of Southeast* Asian Nations (ASEAN). Capital markets in Asia are rapidly developing — and so are the derivatives markets which barely existed a couple of years ago. Korea will open its first futures market early in 1996 and Taiwan is *scheduled to follow suit in 1997. So why did* Malaysia succeed where Mexico failed? And is Malaysia immune from the Mexican malaise?

The *Mexican crisis led to the selling of Third* World currencies which prompted massive intervention by currency authorities — especially in Southeast Asia — at a time when marketing ideas for selling the free market fell on deaf ears, and were indeed sold out. East Asia and Latin America attracted 71 per cent of private sector capital inflows into the South in 1994. In East Asia, direct investment accounted for half of the fund inflows in 1993, up from 10.3 per cent in 1980, while securities investment repre*sented 78.7 per cent of inflows into Latin* America compared with 6.1 per cent in 1980.

These figures point to Mexican — and Latin American — addiction to *foreign capital. What* do these figures mean to the masses in those countries? Latin America has the greatest income disparity in the world — and Mexico is no exception. Poverty claims the lives of 1.5 million people annually across Latin America. Nonetheless, there are more dollar billionaires in Latin America than anywhere else in the South except Asia. Moreover, some 44 per cent of Latin Americans suffer from some form of malnutrition, while some 40 million children live in the streets.

Savings rates in Latin America hover around 20 per cent while in Asia the corresponding figure stands at 30 per cent. In the Third World it is essential to induce a constant inflow of cap*ital from the North to finance investment that* cannot be fully covered by domestic savings. In Mexico, 1995 was the year when the domestic market abruptly dried up and credit seekers knew not where to turn to for help. Other Latin American countries felt jittery too. Even the better-placed newly industrialised nations of East Asia were at risk. As for the rickety economies of South Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America the future looks even shakier.

It will be the challenge of the South in 1996 *to see to it that there is a steady inflow of cap*ital to ensure economic growth. Last February Mexico's interest rates zoomed to 162 per cent, *and President Zedillo could only bring them* down to a still unacceptably high 50 per cent for credit seekers by the end of the year. Direct foreign investment, in contrast to "hot money" securities investment, is normally more stable because the funds cannot be easily withdrawn.

Social unrest and political instability go hand in hand with economic eruptions. In May the ruling Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party — *Partido Revolucionario Institutional* (PRI) — suffered its biggest election losses ever in parliamentary elections. High unemployment and falling living standards were to blame. Bernardo Kilksberg, general coordinator of the Inter-American Institute for Social Development, warned recently that the number of poor people in Latin America had surged in the 1980s by 60 million. Over half the entire population of Latin America now lives in poverty, and there are 40 million indigenous people among the ranks of the poor. In Mexico, as attested to by the tenacity of the Zapatista insurgency in the impoverished southern and mainly indigenous native American province of Chiapas, poverty is stoking up popular rebellion.

1995 kicked off with the Mexican currency crisis that cast a long shadow of doubt on the entire Third World's attractiveness as a destination for direct foreign investment — and especially equity and bond investment. The crisis prompted many of the developing nations of the South to focus attention on the state of their finances. They have been bombarded with the IMF's and the World Bank's so-called "economic fundamentals" that evidently ensure that the capital inflows from the industrially advanced nations of the North will not dry up. Such capital inflows are, of course, essential for generating economic growth — or so the Bretton Woods institutions tell us.

Economic forecasters ought not to forget three basic points. First, they did not detect any sign of oncoming disaster. The Mexican economy shrank by six per cent. Foreign direct investment in Mexico was halved to less than $4 billion in 1995. Second, they failed to come up with a credible explanation for the credit-crippled country's plight. Third, the financial furore over Mexico's currency crisis threatened *to obscure the debate over how best to ensure* the social welfare of South's masses.

Mexico's 95 million people's purchasing power was knocked down — real wages fell by 25 per cent in 1995. Moreover, no social safety net exists. Domestic car sales fell from 650,000 vehicles in 1992 to less than 200,000 in 1995. Meanwhile, Mexican-made car exports grew from under 400,000 in 1992 to 700,000 in 1995. Boosting exports is the only way the country's entrepreneurs can cut their losses — but it does not mean more jobs. A Mexican company cut 8,000 jobs in the last eight years and doubled its output during that period.

The South saw, too, how the share of the private sector in the Mexican economy rose dramatically after the currency crisis — it now accounts for 75 per cent of the country's economic output.



ALL over Latin America, the Mexican currency crisis spurred interest in revolutionary heroes such as the Argentine-born legendary guerilla leader of revolutionary Cuba, Che Guevara. Forensic experts are currently analysing human remains in Vallegrande, Bolivia, this month where Che was believed buried after his execution in 1967 *(photo:AFP)*

World headlines in 1995

January

ON NEW Year's Day, former Somali President Siad Barre dies in exile in Nigeria. Sri Lankan ceasefire agreement signed between the *separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam* and the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga. A leaked document from US Air Force Intelligence files affirms Libya's innocence in the Lockerbie bombing and points the *finger of accusation* at Iran.

February

THE UNITED Nations starts to evacuate its troops from Somalia. Peru and Ecuador sign a truce to end their border war. The People's *Republic of China and the US sign a historic* agreement to end the trade war between them. Historic peace accord in Northern Ireland. The collapse of Britain's prestigious Barings Bank rocks the financial markets *in Europe and Asia.*

March

*THE WORLD Summit for Social Development is held in Co*penhagen. Burundi massacres fuel fears of renewed ethnic violence. Winnie Mandela, the estranged wife of the South African president, is relieved of her ministerial position in the *African National* Congress-led Government of National Unity. The Japanese Aum Shinrikyo sect releases a poisonous nerve gas in the Tokyo metro system. After 20 years of negotiations, a customs *union is* established between the European Union and Turkey.

April

ALBERTO Fujimuri wins the presidential elections in Peru. Uganda severs diplomatic relations with neighbouring Sudan. The Nigerian Constitutional Conference grants the country's military ruler General Sani Abacha an open-ended presidency. A conference on renewing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty starts in New York. A nine-floor federal building in Oklahoma City is blown up; the final tally of the blast comes to 168 dead and 400 injured. Washington imposes comprehensive trade sanctions on Iran and Clinton accuses Tehran of supporting world terrorism.

May

EBOLA virus outbreak in Kikwit, Zaire, *afflicts 315* people, killing 244 of them. Menem wins Argentinian presidential elections. Chirac is inaugurated as the French president and appoints former *Foreign Minister Alain Juppé as prime minister.*

June

*THE LEADER of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, John Ga*rang, agrees to extend the ceasefire in Southern Sudan. America agrees to grant China "most favoured nation" status in spite of *protests from human rights groups. North Korea agrees to freeze* its nuclear programme. Tanzania bans the 10,000 Rwandan refugees from entering its territory. US implements trade sanctions *against Iran. America and Japan agree to resolve their dispute* over car sales.

July

BURMESE opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is released from house arrest after six years. Twenty years after severing diplomatic relations, Washington resumes diplomatic ties with Hanoi. Vietnam becomes the seventh fully fledged member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). 62 are killed or *injured in a massive explosion at Paris's Saint Michel metro sta*tion.

August

THE RULING Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico loses heavily in local elections. Zaire expels Rwandan refugees and halts the expulsions *a week later amid an international outcry.*

September

LIBERIA celebrates the end of the civil war. France carries out the first of eight planned nuclear explosions at the Pacific atoll of Muroroa in spite of international protests. The French navy seizes a Greenpeace boat protesting against the tests. The UN-sponsored Fourth World Conference on Women is convened in Beijing.

October

FRENCH troops invade the Comoros and capture mercenary Bob Denard. The Non-Aligned Nations summit meeting is convened in the Colombian Caribbean resort of Cartagena. O J Simpson is pronounced innocent. The Serbs murder 6,000 Muslims in Europe's worst war crime since World War II.

November

NIGERIA'S military rulers are internationally condemned for the execution of nine human rights activists. The Sri Lankan army *captures the headquarters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ee*lam in the northern city of Jaffna. UNESCO celebrates its 50th anniversary in Paris. Financial scandal hits headlines in South Korea *as former President Roh Tae Woo confesses to collecting* some $650 million from industrial conglomerates. The Egyptian Embassy in the Pakistani capital Islamabad is blown up. Cuban *President Fidel Castro makes his first visit to China.* France is brought to a standstill during the worst series of strikes and social unrest since 1968.

December

GENERAL Chun Doo Hwan, another former South Korean pres*ident, is arrested for masterminding the 1980 military crackdown* on students and workers in the southern city of Kwangju. The Dayton peace agreement for Bosnia is signed in Paris.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Prognosis for peace

The grim looks on the faces of the three signatories to the Bosnia peace treaty in Paris this month mirrored the world community's recollection of 1995. It was a vision of uncertainty.

Standing behind the three men were six other Western leaders, who appeared more like stern paternal figures mediating a sibling dispute than conscientious proponents of peace.

Yet, this was 1995. It was a year where war and terrorism competed with slipshod, nebulous peace initiatives, be it between warring factions in Bosnia or the Palestinians and the Israelis. The victories, when they came, were few and far between. Elections were held in Egypt, Russia, Algeria and Poland. Others, like the Palestinian elections are on the not-so-distant horizon, and those for Bosnia have been decreed in the Dayton Accords.

But, for these elections to be truly representative of the drive for democracy, the impetus for internationalism must find surer footing among vying forces in the political and cultural arenas. For many of the most heinous violators of freedom and human rights, like Nigeria however, this portends the profane. And for reform rejectionists, the pressure is on to connive, cajole or comply

In all, this is a less-than auspicious welcome for 1996. The turmoil and destruction in Chechnya will carry over into the new year. The Palestinians still face dire financial problems that threaten to impede the progress of peace. Terrorism still cloaks its carnage in righteous religious rhetoric, and seems immune to all efforts to stamp it out, as do all attempts to put an end to the genocide in Rwanda. This year is coming to an end, but the despair heralded in with it is far from over.

Although it would be ideal to begin the year with a clean slate, reality decrees otherwise. Forced to play with the cards they have been dealt, the world's leaders must search for the answers to their problems within themselves. No other country, as residents of Hong Kong, which is entering into its last full year as a colony, will testify, can realistically impose solutions on another.

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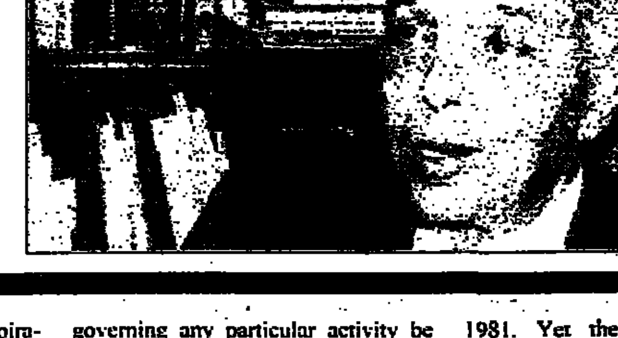
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Pruning the jungle

Ibrahim Nafie argues for a streamlining of the red tape that governs every aspect of life, and that has proved such an obstacle to development



Rationalising the 62,000 laws that have somehow contrived to remain on the statute books might appear a near impossible task. It is certainly a daunting prospect to reformulate and completely overhaul the vast body of laws that governs every aspect of our social, economic and political activity. Yet it is essential that this impenetrable jungle of legislation be pruned if Egypt is to realise its potential in the next century.

Certainly Egypt does not lack those with the ability to oversee this process of essential reform. What is necessary is less the personnel than a new legislative philosophy, one that does not automatically assume that national life is permeated with malice aforethought but rather assumes that the Egyptian citizen and the organisations that represent citizens have sufficient good will not to need their activities to be completely circumscribed by proscriptive legislation.

We must begin by assuming that individuals are honest until it is proven otherwise. This is the case in all advanced countries. It is an unfortunate leftover of colonialism that there is an undeclared assumption that Third World citizens are somehow innately criminal. Only this can explain the elaborate maze of checks and restraints that are somehow supposed to protect developing societies from themselves.

It is certainly time that we began to organise our lives along the lines that have brought ease and progress to the peoples of the developed world. And our first task must be to rid ourselves of the innumerable discrepancies, redundant amendments and intricate appendices that hamper our legal system. Such legislative reform will involve the formulation of a clear conceptual framework that specifies collectively agreed upon goals and aspirations. The next step will then be a process of refining actual legislation so as to make such goals and aspirations a possibility.

The origins of Egypt's legislative system began in 1883 with the promulgation of a fundamental core of civil, commercial and private laws. But since then Egypt has undergone massive transformations that have changed the country from a simple, land-based, agricultural economy into a complex economic organism. Unfortunately, during these transformations a vast number of laws remained on the statute books rather than being systematically abrogated. This has led to the position where a vast number of laws remain technically enforceable even though they are fundamentally opposed to current policies of economic liberalisation and democratisation.

The process of legislative reform demands a precise definition of goals and a clarity of vision. Surely it is possible that all the laws and regulations governing any particular activity be treated as a single text. And any regulatory activity that proves necessary should fall within the mandate of a single agency rather than large numbers of competing agencies. The purpose of legislative reform is, after all, to lend dynamism to society rather than to encumber progress.

At the moment any single activity is subject to vast numbers of often conflicting laws. Farmers, for instance, have to contend with over a hundred individual items of legislation that are subdivided into a vast number of appendices. There are, for example, over 28 ministerial decrees concerning the quarantine of livestock alone.

Housing too is subject to a similarly complicated tangle of laws. Law 19/1977 regulates the relationship between landlord and tenant; Law 136/1981 concerns special provisions for the sale of property and amends the relationship between landlord and tenant in 31 appendices that were published in the official gazette of 3 July, 1981. Yet the landlord-tenant relationship is even further complicated by the fact that the two laws mentioned above also make reference to the housing laws of 1974 and 1976. What is obviously needed is a single, comprehensive law containing all the necessary provisions and regulations, so that concerned parties do not have to search through a mountain of references in order to find out what is legally required of them.

The current complexity of legislation leads to many people innocently incurring penalties which they would have preferred to avoid had they only known what was legally permissible. To avoid this situation, what is necessary is that any amendments to current laws be widely publicised. The official gazette, which does indeed contain details of all legislative amendments, is obviously not doing the job, and other alternatives need to be investigated.

It is also imperative that we streamline the application of the law. At the moment there are a large number of different authorities — ministries, ministerial departments, tax authorities etc — supposed to oversee the application of the law. The result is confusion, as plaintiffs appeal to those authorities that they think will further their own particular interests, while the various authorities vie amongst themselves in the exercise of their often conflicting mandates.

In short, Egypt has undergone enormous economic and social change with which the legal system has not kept pace. As a result every area of investment, commercial, industrial, agricultural and banking law must be subject to a thorough and comprehensive review, bearing in mind current policy goals.

In reforming current legislation there are certain primary objectives. These include the simplification of investment procedures in such a manner as to attract investors. It is necessary, too, that we organise and promote industrial and agricultural production, which necessitates removing a great deal of the red tape involved in obtaining permits, licences, etc.

The regulation of banks and the stock market must be streamlined and commercial law formulated in such a way as to facilitate the movement of goods and services internally and across borders. Tax laws must be amended so as to alleviate financial burdens on new enterprises.

We need legislation that allows for the speedy and precise exercise of the law. The judicial system and the administrative process of law are long overdue an overhaul. Simplicity, speed and precision must be our watchwords if we are to escape the needless suffering caused by the sluggish application of the 62,000 conflicting laws currently occupying the statute books.

Lessons from Russia

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed probes the significance of the recent revival of communism in Russia and questions whether it augurs a return to the bipolar world order

The impressive victory scored by the communists in Russia's recent parliamentary elections, where they managed to win about a third of the seats in the State Duma, or lower house of parliament, has provoked deep unease in the West. Indeed, the return of the Communists to power in most East European countries only a few years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall is seen by some as one of the most important developments of 1995.

Perhaps in an attempt to downplay the significance of the event, Washington's official reaction to the surprise win by the Communists was to congratulate Moscow for conducting what international observers confirmed were fair and free elections. But Western capitals are aware that although the high turnout and orderly voting attest to the consolidation of democracy in Russia, the results could lead to a dangerous impasse, if not immediately, then after the presidential elections scheduled for next June.

Yeltsin has also tried to dismiss the election results as inconsequential, claiming that opposition gains — 22 per cent scored by the Communists led by Gennadi Zyuganov, 11 per cent by the ultra-nationalist party of Vladimir Zhirinovsky, 10 per cent by the centrist party of Prime Minister Viktor S Chernomyrdin and 9 per cent by the reformist Yabloko Party of Gregori Yavlensky — will not have much effect on the Kremlin's policy. He may be right: under the constitution as amended by Yeltsin in 1993, the president can rule in many areas by decree, while the Duma is weak and its functions limited.

Still, the West is worried that if these percentages remain as they are until next June, and the pro-reformists remain unable to decide on a united candidate, the presidential election could become a race between the communist leader, Zyuganov, and the nationalist leader, Zhirinovsky, both hostile to the economic reforms the West is pushing for, with the pro-reformists left out in the cold.

Various proposals are being floated to avert this worst-case scenario — at least in western eyes. One is that Yeltsin could run for a new term. But given the serious heart ailment from which he is still recuperating, it is unlikely that the incumbent president can assume the burdens of office a further term.

Another is that if the reformists succeed in unifying their ranks, they could form a broad coalition capable of garnering more supporters than those who voted for the communists in the parliamentary elections and enable one of their leaders, perhaps presidential aspirant Gregori Yavlensky of the Yabloko Party, to beat Communist Party leader Gennadi Zyuganov in the presidential elections. But unlike the communists, who have by far the largest and best-organised party structure in the country, the reformists are deeply divided among themselves, and are unlikely to resolve their political differences and personal animosities in time for the elections.

Still another proposal is that Yeltsin can use the extraordinary powers conferred on him by the constitution to postpone the elections for a year or more, to give the economic reforms he has instituted time to bear fruit. But the West considers that postponing the elections would further shake Yeltsin's democratic image, already severely damaged when he turned his cannons on the parliament building two years ago.

While the proposals may differ, everyone agrees that the election results served as an alarm signal that the reforms as they have been instituted to date have not responded to the aspirations of the Russian people, but have, on the contrary, engendered frustration, disillusionment and intense discontent, and that unless the West honours its declared commitments, communism is bound to reaquire a leading position in Russia. As such, the results of the parliamentary elections could spur the West into taking preemptive and corrective measures before the presidential elections next June. But the communists will use the results of these elections to their own advantage. They have also drawn useful lessons from the experience of the Soviet Union, and are aware that their cause would not be served if they attempt to recreate Soviet history in the form of the despotic Stalinist model, Brezhnev's 'stagnation' period or Gorbachev's perestroika. If it is true that the Soviet Union collapsed because of its inability to cope with the challenges of the age, it is equally true that the system which replaced it has proved to be an abysmal failure, and that if they come to power the communists will have to 'invent' a future distinct from both models.

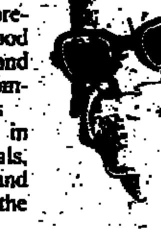
In fact, a return to the Stalinist past is more likely by Zhirinovsky-style ultra-nationalists than by new-age Russian communists. Stalin was a Georgian, not a Russian, but he had no compunctions about tapping into the deep-rooted nationalism of the Russian people whenever the Soviet Union was seriously threatened. When Hitler's troops were at the gates of Moscow, he used the slogan, "Down with the German invaders", rather than "down with the Nazi invaders", in the belief that when it came to defending Mother Russia, nationalism was a more effective rallying cry than communism.

That is why it is not likely that a comeback by the communists in Russia will restore the bipolar world system which prevailed throughout the second half of the twentieth century, if only because the communists themselves would not be able to justify it. Indeed, the division of the world into two camps, did not reflect the communist philosophy of class struggle, and the outcome of the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union was decided less by class struggle than by the arms race. The Soviet Union did not collapse because of the defeat of Marxist ideology, but because it could not keep up with America in preparing for Star Wars.

While if the Communist Party comes to power it may call for the restoration of the Soviet Union, it would be more in the aim of restoring battered Russian dignity than of recreating the Soviet past. This begs the question of whether there can be an alternative model to the brand of communism experienced in the twentieth century. Can communism rest on a foundation of frustration rather than on the basis of a project for the future? Can a different variant of communism be invented? The resurgence of Marxist studies in many French and American universities, bears eloquent testimony to the fact that the post-bipolar world order still lacks a conceptual framework, and that any such framework cannot afford to ignore Marxism altogether. But it is difficult to see how a variant of Marxism emanating from Western academia can be blended with a Russian version of Marxism initially triggered by frustration.

Towards the universal

By Naguib Mahfouz



There are no features that are the exclusive prerogative of good literature, beyond the comprehensiveness of the ideas in which it deals, and the depth and vision of the work.

Literary excellence is a standard that applies across national boundaries. The fact that a writer may not be known outside his home country does not affect the stature of that writer. Stature is, after all, determined by the work, not by the extent of its dissemination. Stature is not determined by the acquisition of awards.

The failure to win prizes cannot be held against any particular writer, nor can success in winning awards be taken as a guarantee of quality. The picture is far more complex than this, and works of literature cannot be reduced to prize giving citations.

As for localism, it is an inevitability, since the writer does not write except of the reality he lives. Dostoevsky, for instance, is a local writer. He takes the reader with him to the streets and quarters of old Moscow, with its characters and their problems. Yet no one can deny the universality of Dostoevsky, a universality which is derived from the characteristics of the literature itself, not from the place where the events occur. Universality, then, has an aesthetic and not a topographical character.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

Opening a new path

The one good thing about 1995 could be the lessons learned from it, argues **Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed**

No matter from what social class they may come, what ideological position they may espouse, or which political party they may support, few people will regret the passing of 1995. In many ways it was a year of failed expectations.

In the economic sphere, it was expected that Egypt would reach an agreement with the World Bank and, more importantly, with the Paris Club of creditor nations, which would alleviate the country's foreign-debt burden. This would be done by the cancellation of the remaining 20 per cent of the debt, as the Club had previously promised.

However in the event, the IMF, with the support of creditor countries, insisted that the government should first devalue the currency and implement an accelerated privatisation programme of public-sector enterprises.

The Egyptian government responded by maintaining that the proposed devaluation of the pound would not stimulate an increase in exports, as had been claimed, and that public-sector privatisation was proceeding, but that potential buyers had not been found, or that their terms were not attractive.

Meanwhile, many citizens were waiting for the fruits of the much-discussed economic reforms to appear — particularly in alleviating poverty and reducing unemployment. But they saw no sign that the first phase of economic reform had met with success, or that the country's economic troubles were being dealt with in a satisfactory way.

In the political sphere, many observers thought that the holding of parliamentary elections in November 1995 would usher in a new relationship between the government and the opposition parties and movements. The threat of terrorist activities, particularly in Upper Egypt, receded as the year unfolded, this despite the assassination attempt against the president in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa in June — an event that was condemned by nearly all the country's public figures. Commentators even dreamed of a new People's Assembly that would include a good number of representatives from all the major political parties in the country, while still allowing the ruling NDP to retain control through a two-thirds majority.

The parliamentary elections, however, saw tens of people killed, hundreds wounded, and large numbers of people arrested from among the ranks of militants from certain opposition groups. In the event, the opposition parties and genuinely independent candidates won the smallest number of seats since the multi-party system was reintroduced in 1976.

The opposition parties accused the government of having rigged the voting, and took their case to the courts. The government responded by accusing the opposition of resorting to such tactics in an attempt to disguise their own failure to communicate successfully with the electorate. Relations between government and opposition became very strained as a result.

One hopes that 1996 will mark an improvement, both economically and politically. However if present trends continue, then no one has the right to optimism. If, on the other hand, economic policy-makers and political partners can show more imagination, and if the government is able to accept that opposition leaders and independent public figures have genuine cause for complaint, then 1996 could see a leap forward towards balanced economic growth and the opening of a new path in the country's politics.

The writer is professor of political science at Cairo University.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

A New Year's wish

Al-'Asabiya, or tribalism, is supposed to have been a fundamental feature of this year's parliamentary elections in Egypt. Analysts have been lamenting the fact that the bulk of Egyptian voters went to the polls on the basis of "tribal", rather than political, allegiances. One should not be greatly surprised, however, to note that this kind of assertion runs counter to other models of Egyptian society, which are dearly-held by the same analysts: the 5000-year-old centralised/hydraulic state model with its homogeneous, fully integrated society, for example, or the model of the omnipotent state stomping on a weak and beleaguered civil society. (If anything, tribalism implies the subservience of the state to civil society). The contradiction should not surprise us, not because it is insubstantial, but because there is nothing new in social science scholarship in Egypt upholding a multiplicity of theoretical models and using them interchangeably in accordance with the principle: If it seems to fit, use it. A modicum of coherence is maintained, often with great difficulty, in a single article or study, but to expect any semblance of a coherent and integrated view in the body of an 'analysts' work is apparently to ask too much.

Be that as it may. Models aside, we really do have very few tribes in Egypt, which account, moreover, for an extremely tiny fraction of the population. How then can we explain 'tribal' voter behaviour, which led on occasion to people being killed as they expressed support for a candidate not because they strongly shared his ideas or his platform, but because he was a Saidi or a Menoufi, the 'son' of this village, or *ezba*? The explanation, to my mind, is a simple one, once we discard the intellectuals' habit of believing 'ordinary people' to be stupid, so long as they do not follow the analysts' 'enlightened' advice.

People have strategies of coping, of manipulating existing structures and circumstances in ways that can make their daily lives, if not better, at least a little easier. And having recognised, long before the analysts, that the ruling class in this country is not interested in ruling politically, and that the name of the game is direct access to the state bureaucracy, they set about *creating* tribal identities that can give them some claim to a route to the state. A shared identity with an MP, however fabricated, gives the ordinary citizen some claim on that MP's access to the state: help with a licence to add an ugly new storey to the top of an already ugly and dilapidated building perhaps; maybe a job for an unemployed son; perhaps better police treatment if that same son, or his brother, were to be found without his ID; whatever.

The moral of this story goes well beyond the 1995 parliamentary elections in Egypt. This is, after all, an age of tribalism. New, and increasingly, smaller tribal identities are appearing alongside, and within, the great tribes of the age: the West, the Islamic *Umma*, etc. But despite all their claims to an essentialism steeped in thousands of years of history, the warring tribes of today's world, both the great and the exceedingly small, are no less the creatures of thoroughly modern political strategies than are the tribalist voters of this year's elections in Egypt. Israel, after all, is nothing more than a state-of-the-art tribe.

My New Year's wish for '96: Deliver us O Lord from a post-modern world, and return to us our humanity.



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Intolerance

As the Cold War gained momentum in the late 1950s, bipolarisation was the name of the game, and spheres of influence were the common denominators for the balance of international politics. George Orwell introduced to a wary, war-weary global audience, a book entitled *1984*. Orwell described what he feared would be the future of the world; one ruled by dictatorial systems that dominate and manipulate their citizens through distorted ideals, meaningless rhetoric, and the most notorious mechanism of coercion and forced conviction — terror.

To everyone's relief, 1984 came and went, Orwell's vision proved to be, at worst premature, at best misguided. And when the Cold War drew to a close, and communism in the Soviet Union and its satellites collapsed, the world basked in the triumph of democracy.

Centuries-old foes, who had revelled in each others' despair, began to reconcile their differences. Human rights and cooperation became international buzz-words and elections were re-emphasised as the vehicle for democratic progress. But in 1995, the actors on the international political stage discovered that although strident moves towards democracy had been realised, the world was still embroiled in ethnic and nationalistic conflicts it had thought were long-since resolved. Overwhelmed by the miasma of despair, political honchos postured and postulated, caucused and connived. In more than one instance, they walked away from the negotiating table with, if nothing else, a tenuous patchwork of peace they hoped would hold until a more concrete arrangement could be reached.

But true to the adage that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, the events that punctuated 1995 with glory and gore were blatantly indicative of the emergence of internationalism in all facets of life; political, social and economic. The names of the key players and reluctant participants may differ from country to country, but the theme was one and the same for all, would tolerance succumb to intolerance and the peace makers fall to the peace breakers?

Terrorism, which had long been deemed a Middle Eastern phenomenon, gained prominence on the headlines of the world's newspapers as it became the primary form of communication for indignant religious extremists around the world. Piety, among some, was transformed into a misguided political sensitivity, and the faithful became the butchers who attempted to convert through carnage versus words. The butcher's theatre was global.

Unable to find a foothold in Egypt, Islamists trekked to Ethiopia. On an open stretch of road in Addis Ababa last June, President Hosni Mubarak was ambushed by fundamentalists crudely exhibiting their discontent with his political reforms. Unscathed and amid much fanfare, upon his return to Egypt, Mubarak impressed upon the international community the need to recognise the global threat posed by fanaticism.

The world, however, was already arising from its slumber. In March, an apocalyptic Japanese cult, the Aum Shinrikyo, allegedly released nerve gas in a Tokyo subway, killing 12 and injuring scores of others. And then in April, a disgruntled former soldier, Timothy McVeigh, planted a home-made bomb outside the federal building in Oklahoma City, and robbed 169 of their lives. While another 500 were injured, the body count, at least psychologically, extended into millions. America had been attacked. This time, the threat did not come from Islamists like Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, but from one of its own. The predominantly orthodox, right-wing militias, that had for years been dormant in the US, found their voice. It was laced with venom and contempt for American society.

Other groups in America were also dissatisfied. Following the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November, it came to light that funding and training for right-wing Jewish extremists groups was being sponsored by Brooklyn Jews in New York. For these hard-liners, the progress of Israeli peace with the Arab world was alarming. Although Rabin was sufficiently pragmatic to realise that the fruits of peace by far outweigh those accrued through war, Kach extremists and other right-wingers saw this drive for conciliation as compromising to the Israeli national identity. But, much like those who attempted to kill Mubarak in Ethiopia, their only accomplishment was to festoon their religious and political platform in an exceedingly pejorative and unsympathetic light. The tears of dismay shed for Rabin at his funeral are being replaced by tears of joy as Arabs and Israelis gradually build upon September's Oslo II agreement.

The egregious onslaught of terrorism, coupled with the bloodstained spoils of war, however, have sparked a new flame in the heart of the global community. The four-year long Bosnia crisis drew to a close this month after a tenuous peace was signed in Paris. And democratic elections, which the Dayton Accords call for, will find strong precedent in various pockets of the world. Egypt, in November, concluded parliamentary elections that, although not incident-free, were indicative that the seeds of democracy are still being nurtured in the Middle East. As in all elections, dissent was evident, but the true character of democracy remained unblemished here, as it did in Poland and Russia, where old ideologies found new footing in the post-Cold War era.

As the year draws to an end, it is all too easy to look back on the tragedies, the miscarriages of justice, the death and despair; to wring one's hands in sorrow at the lives lost, and to hold in disdain the current state of affairs. But the true essence of progress is found in the ability to stand firm in the face of adversity. It also lies in being able to promise all those who lost their lives in 1995 to war, and racial and ethnic hatred, that with conviction, trial and error, the face of terror will be replaced with freedom, intolerance with tolerance.

Tarek El-Tablawy





MARKED MEN: Religious extremism reared its ugly head last June in Addis Ababa, and again in Tel Aviv in November, with the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak and the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister *Yitzhak Rabin*. Both men have been at the core of the Arab-Israeli peace process. While in Israel, Shin Beit endured stinging criticism about its security measures at the rally where Rabin was killed, Mubarak's guards received strong commendation for their poise and professionalism under pressure.



INDISCRIMINATE HATE: After militants failed to make headlines in Egypt, they resorted to terror abroad. The Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad was the scene of a massive bomb explosion on 19 November, which left 17 dead and 60 wounded. Back home, the state burial of the Egyptian victims became a popular protest against terror.





CULTURE ON TRIAL: In 1995, Egyptian secular intellectuals grappled with both religious extremism and the onslaught against freedom of expression. After months of wrangling, the Abdin Appellate Court lifted the ban on veteran director Youssef Chahine's epic film, *The Emigrant*. But while Chahine prevailed, Professor Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid; after being deemed an apostate by both Islamist lawyers and the courts, remains entangled in a legal battle following a court decision to divorce him from his wife.



TWIN CELEBRATIONS: Altar boys and armed Palestinian police combined the celebrations of the birth of Christ and the nascent Palestinian self-rule in Bethlehem this Christmas. For a change, religion and politics met on common ground to further the cause of peace. Last Thursday, Bethlehem became the sixth West Bank town to become autonomous under the Israeli-PLO Oslo II agreement.







Compromise, carnage and consensus

Long past its deadline, the Oslo II agreement was finally signed, with pomp and circumstance, in Washington last September (top right and centre). Already celebrated by two White House ceremonies, Palestinian-Israeli peace is yet to face its major challenge: final status negotiations.

Three months after Oslo II, a peace settlement for war-ravaged Bosnia was hammered out in Paris. Nothing could erase the Nazi-style war crimes committed by the Serbs against Bosnia's Muslims, however, and as the grim faces of Milosevic, Tudjman and Izetbegovik (below) show, little has been forgotten or forgiven. More than 3 million mines scattered around former-Yugoslavia (left) will make the job of rebuilding Bosnia even more daunting.

As the Palestinians and the Bosnians gear up for elections in the not-too-distant future, the prospects of peace in the breakaway republic of Chechnya remain grim, despite elections which were held on 17 December. Months of fighting have taken their toll on the inhabitants, and has taken the lives of thousands. This blood-spattered young girl (top left), was thankfully spared.





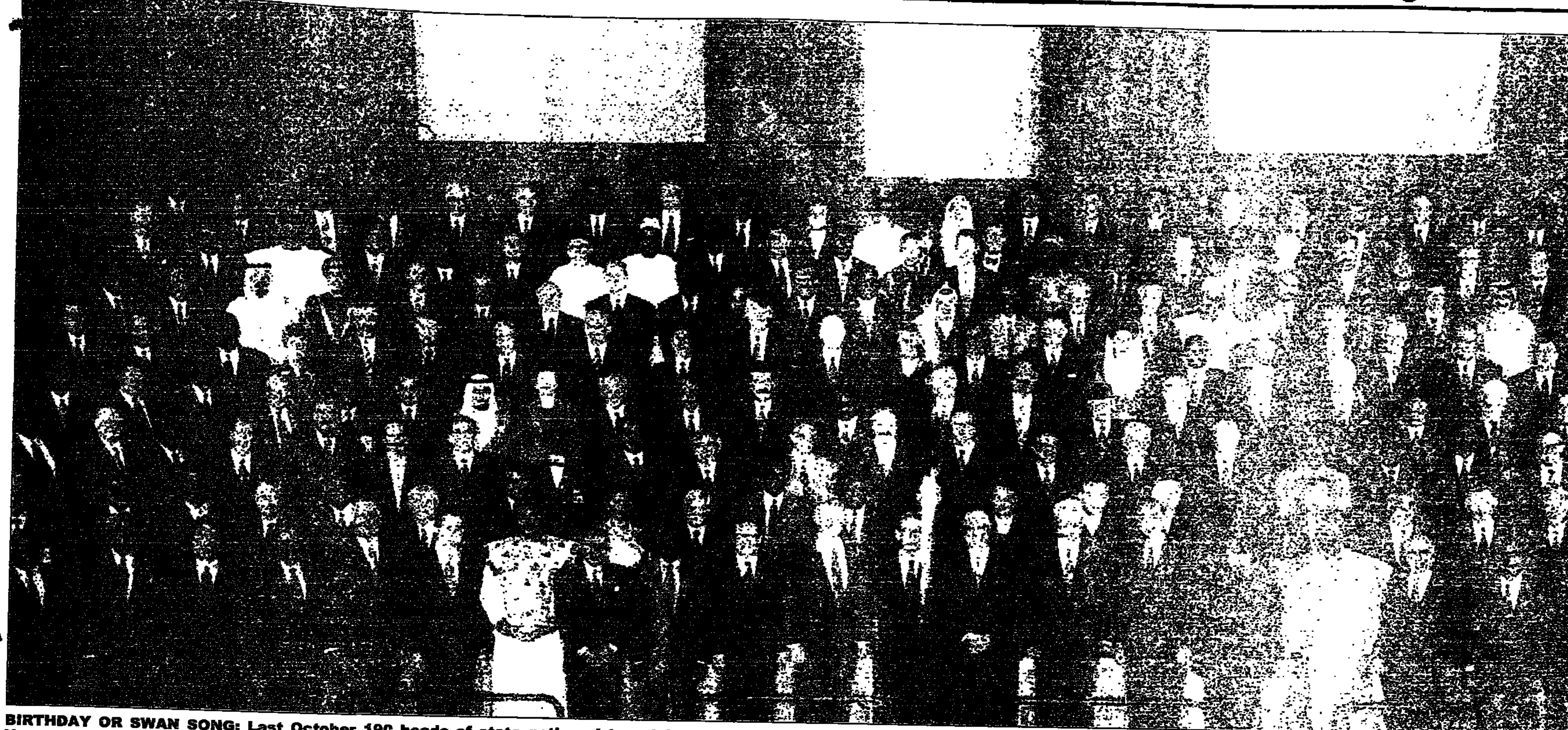


FIGHTING BACK: Following international and local opposition to France's resumption of nuclear testing, an unprecedented backlash against the shrinking welfare state came to a head in the country last November. The nation was paralysed as five million workers participated in a strike against social security slashes and the threats of privatisation.





BOUNDLESS TERROR: In the four corners of the globe, the face of terror, symbolised by Omar Abdel-Rahman, Yigal Amir, Timothy McVeigh and Shoko A sahara, broke ethnic and national barriers to wreak havoc on the citizens of the world in the name of religious righteousness. To date, the only consolation for the loved ones of victims like this child, who died in the Oklahoma City bombing, are court convictions. In grief, the world has raised its voice. But who is really listening?



BIRTHDAY OR SWAN SONG: Last October 190 heads of state gathered to celebrate the United Nations' 50th anniversary. US President Bill Clinton, Palestine's Yasser Arafat, French President Jacques Chirac and Russian President Boris Yeltsin joined UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali for the event. Meanwhile the devastated peoples of war-torn Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Rwanda, among others, were finding it difficult to wish the UN a happy birthday.





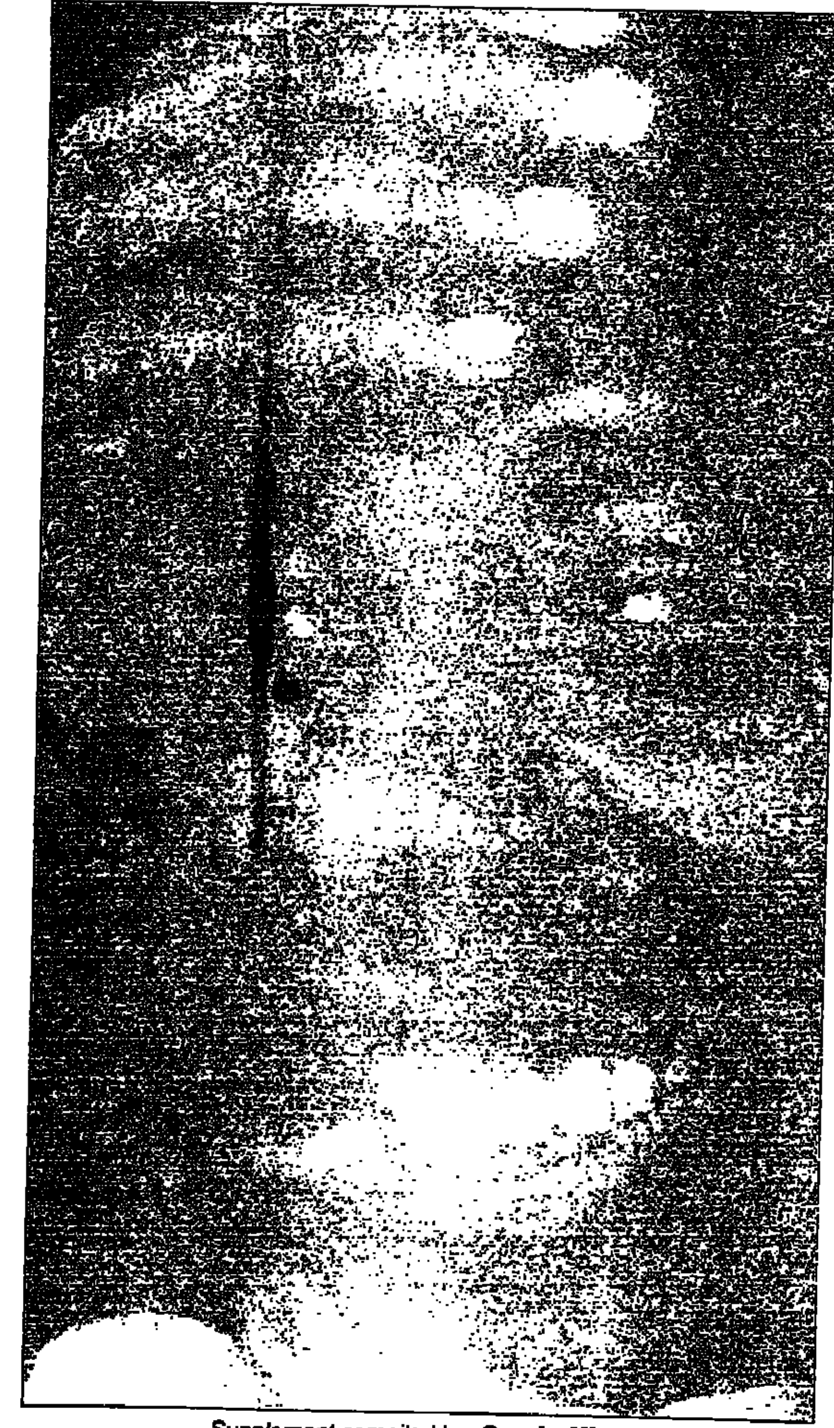


PRACTICING DEMOCRACY: Over 49 per cent of all Egyptians went to the polls to elect a new People's Assembly with 444 seats up for grabs. The ruling National Democratic Party managed to secure 71 per cent of the seats. The largest elections in Egypt's history were, however, plagued with violence — over 35 people were killed and 400 wounded in the process, according to more conservative reports.

For the first time since their independence in 1962, the Algerian people voted in the country's presidential elections last November. Incumbent President Liamine Zeroual won 60 per cent of the votes. The Islamic-oriented Hamas Party candidate lagged far behind with only 25 per cent of the votes. Zeroual who had been an "appointed" president since January 1994 not only won legitimacy in the elections, but also the approval from all the parties in conflict in Algeria.

Electoral action in Eastern Europe brought about surprising results as reformed communist parties dominated the polls. In Poland, Lech Walesa, the veteran trade unionist who helped introduce democracy to a once floundering communist country, had a taste of his own medicine as voters cast their ballots against him. One week later, in neighbouring Russia, the Communist Party came on top in Duma elections.





HUMAN WRONGS: Two million refugees who fled the raging civil war in Rwanda are still stranded in deplorable conditions in neighbouring countries. The refugees, who fear returning to their homeland, are caught between borders; Zaire threatened to repatriate those seeking refuge while Tanzania recently decided it would no longer grant entrance to refugees. Among the two million, are an estimated 10,000 war criminals. However bringing them to justice has thus far proven futile.

Also futile were worldwide attempts to stop the execution in Nigeria of Ken Saro-Wiwa and another eight members of his minority tribe, the Ogoni. Saro-Wiwa, author, environmentalist and political activist, was charged by a military tribunal with the murder of four ethnic Ogonis, who were killed at a rally by pro Saro-Wiwa youths. The Nigerian court paid no heed to international allegations that the charges were a sham and the verdict pre-determined. The hangings, which outraged many leaders and human rights groups, prompted the Commonwealth to suspend Nigeria from its group. Saro-Wiwa was nominated for the 1996 Nobel peace prize last April.

Supplement compiled by: ***Samia Nkrumah, Jasmine Makled, Jihan Ammar*** *and* ***Tarek El-Tablawi***





ROYAL AFFAIRS: The year 1995 was particularly eventful for Britain's royal family. In October the Queen made a blunder during a telephone conversation with a radio commentator who pretended to be the Canadian prime minister, Jean Chrétien. The impostor managed to embarrass the Queen on air when he asked her to help persuade Quebec separatists to stay. The royal mum replied by simply saying if a speech was written for her, she would read it. Just a month later Lady Diana made a memorable appearance on the British Broadcasting Channel (BBC) and dispelled any lingering doubts that she was faithful during her marriage to Prince Charles. Royal indiscretions notwithstanding, Diana and Charles have not lost their glamour, and as the Prince's first official visit to Egypt in May of this year revealed, he remains popular, even as far afield as Cairo's working class district of Imbaba.



BABY IN A MANGER: In attendance at Palestinian Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem were Palestine's first lady, Suha Arafat, and her 6 month-old daughter Zahwa — just one of Yasser Arafat's achievements of the year.



IF THE GLOVE FITS: OJ Simpson's much hyped million-dollar murder trial revealed the black and white line that divides America.



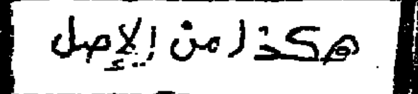
SWIMMING TO SUCCESS: Individual initiative overcomes sports bureaucracy. No one epitomises this statement more than Rania Elwani, the 17-year-old Egyptian swimmer and the proud holder of three gold medals and three new African records, in the Sixth All Africa Games in Harare, Zimbabwe.



COLLECTOR'S TREASURES: A major art collection, consisting mostly of 19th century French paintings and sculptures, amassed by the late Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil, found a new home in 1995. The Khalil family villa, located in Giza, was converted — at a reputed cost of LE6 million — into a museum fit to house the collection of its former owner.



CULTURE AND CENSORSHIP: The appointment of Dorreya Sharaf Eddin as Egypt's chief censor earlier this year seemed to bring a high profile to the post. An expert on the film industry with publications of her own, and with years of acquainting Egyptian television-viewers with trends in world cinema through her weekly programme, *Ciné-Club*, she was surely equipped to meet the requirements of the job without coming down hard on art.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Collapsing hopes

As 1995 draws to a close a *great many* storm clouds remain on the horizon. The region's political and economic bodies, intended to foster a sense of cohesion and solidarity among the countries of the Arab world, are displaying alarming signs of disintegration. The region is gripped by a series of crises that threaten the internal stability of individual countries, while external forces appear intent on encouraging the fragmentation that has already wreaked havoc on regional unity.

Eritrea's audacious occupation — after taking a number of Yemeni soldiers prisoner — of a strategically important Red Sea island, is merely the tip of the iceberg. The Maghreb is rent with discords and divisions, most serious among them the increasing tensions between Morocco and Algeria engendered by long running conflicts over the Western Sahara. Nor has the Gulf been spared its share of problems. Qatar has withdrawn from the Gulf Cooperation Council, and faces internal problems as the deposed emir attempts to reclaim the throne.

The conflict in the south of the Red Sea seems to be more than just a dispute between Yemen and Eritrea. Opposing international interests, together with the desire of Arab and non-Arab forces to control the gateways to the Red Sea, have compounded the problem, making the strategically important islands, which control navigation channels, the focus of international concern.

Certainly the conflict has come at a most inauspicious time for Yemen, still attempting to re-order itself internally after the north-south war and strike a balance in its relations with its powerful neighbour, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf countries. And the renewal of the dispute between Morocco and Algeria over the Western Sahara comes at a particularly unfortunate time, when both countries are in desperate need of cooperation if they are to confront the forces of terrorism and overcome the economic and social backwardness from which they both suffer.

Tensions between Morocco and Algeria have put an end, to all intents and purposes, to any meaningful activity by the Maghreb Union, just at the time when Europe is making unprecedented overtures to the countries of the Mediterranean in an attempt to establish systems of partnership and cooperation. Yet at precisely the moment the Maghreb needs to present a united position, it is collapsing into factionalism, making it all too likely that European overtures will result not in cooperation but in containment.

Even more alarming is the emergence in the Gulf of inter-Arab disputes concerning the ruling regimes and the degree of consensus they enjoy. Qatar, for instance, found itself isolated after opposing the choice of a Saudi as secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The picture was further complicated by the arrival of Qatar's former emir, intent on reclaiming his position. Disputes between Iran and the Gulf countries over the sovereignty of islands in the Red Sea continue unabated, while efforts by some parties to effect a reconciliation with Iraq have faltered, leaving the Iraqi people prey to hunger, possible partition, and external interference.

It is against this picture of disintegration that Israel has been seeking to establish diplomatic ties with the countries of the Arab Gulf, in advance of any progress on the Syria-Lebanon track, and before settling outstanding issues with the Palestinians.

If we add to all this, wrangling within the Arab League, and the increased momentum of moves to formulate a new Middle East order, it would be nigh on impossible to feel optimistic about the future. We can abandon thoughts about making things better. What is necessary is to take urgent action to avoid a complete collapse.



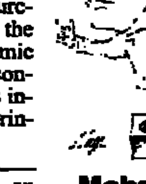
Soapbox

The rule of law

For many people, the concepts Islamism and secularism are too nebulous for meaningful discussion. But if we were to assess Egypt in such terms we would find that until the mid-nineteenth century, Egypt remained an Islamic state in its fullest sense. True, over the ages there had been numerous injustices and breaches of the law. Yet at no time since the beginnings of Islam in Egypt had their been any theoretica source for government other than Islam or any arbiter of justice other than Islamic jurisprudence.

Then, in the second half of the 19th century, particularly after the completion of the Suez Canal, secular law began its ingress. In the ports, tribunals operating under foreign commercial law adjudicated between Egyptian merchants and foreigners. Consular courts were established to settle disputes between Egyptians and foreigners according to the law of the country the particular consulate represented. In the Mixed Courts, established in 1875, the judges were foreigners, the lingua franca was French and the law used was the Napoleonic code.

Egypt came to be neither totally Islamic nor totally secular. Yet government and society remained intimately bound to Islam. *A government which allocates funds for religious education*, established and supports mosques, sends envoys from among the clerisy and observes Islamic principles in many aspects of its comportment cannot possibly be described as fully secular. To view *the state as anti-Islamic* is erroneous: it would be equally wrong to describe it as fully Islamic. What we have is a Muslim government, the legal and judicial institutions of which can and should be purified of non-Islamic sources of law. This process of regulating the authority of law involves a new Islamic drive that is in step with modern, contemporary development, yet draws its inspiration from the core of values, principles and intent of Islamic law.



This week's Soapbox speaker is an Islamic scholar and writer.

Mohamed Emara

Towards a strategy for liberation

In our last issue Anouar Abdel-Malek and Martin Bernal talked to the Weekly *about their views on the "clash of civilizations". Below,* **Samir Amin** *argues that the culturalist notions propagated by Huntington and others are part of a strategy that guarantees victory to the West. In this arena of conflict the dice are loaded: the West will always win, and this is why the Others' culturalist option can not only be tolerated, but can even be encouraged, he writes*

DOMINANT IDEOLOGIES are by definition conservative: in order to reproduce themselves, all forms of social organisation must perceive themselves as the end of history. However the first step of scientific thought consists precisely in seeking to go beyond the vision that social systems have of themselves. Conservative dominant discourses acquire their strength through the vulgar practice of amalgamating the "values" that they pretend rule the modern world. Into this amalgamation are tossed principles of political organisation (notions of *legality, of the State, human rights, democracy*), social values (freedom, equality, individualism), principles of the organisation of economic life (private property, the "free market"), and such an amalgamation allows one to suppose that these values constitute an indivisible whole, arising from the same logical process. Hence the association of capitalism with democracy, as if this were an obvious or necessary association. However history tends to show the contrary: that democratic advances have been won and are *not* the natural, spontaneous product of capitalist expansion.

UNLESS WE WANT the "end of history" to be the end of the history of *humanity and the* planet through their destruction, capitalism must be transcended. As opposed to previous systems, which took thousands of years to unfold before exhausting their historical potentials, capitalism may ultimately appear as a brief parenthesis in history, during which the elementary tasks of accumulation were accomplished, but which only paved the way for a posterior social order characterised by a superior, non-alienated rationality and based on an authentic, planetary humanism. In other words, capitalism did in fact exhaust its positive historical potential very early on; it ceased to be the means (if only the "unconscious" *means*) by *which progress finds its path*, and now it has, on the contrary, become an obstacle to progress.

Progress is here defined not as the involuntary product associated with the expansion of capital, but through criteria defined in contrast with the latter's real products, which are economic alienation, ecological destruction and global polarisation. This contradiction explains why the history of capitalism has been constituted from its origin by successive contrasting movements, during some of which the logic of its expansion is experienced as a unilateral force, and during others, the intervention of anti-systemic forces imposes less destructive *forms of capital expansion*.

The nineteenth century, with the unequal unfolding of the industrial revolution, proletarisation and colonisation, is characteristic of the first mode of expression of capitalist expansion. But in spite of hymns to the glory of capital, the violence of the system's real contradictions was nevertheless driving history not to its end as announced in triumphalist "belle époque" proclamations, but to world wars, socialist revolutions and the revolt of the colonised peoples. Re-established in post-World War I Europe, triumphant liberalism aggravated the chaos and paved the way for the illusory, criminal response that Fascism was to provide.

It is therefore only from 1945 on, after the failure of Fascism was complete, that a phase of civilised expansion was opened through the three historic compromises that Sovietism, *social* democracy and the national liberation movements imposed. None of these compromises made a complete break with the logic of capitalism, but all of them imposed upon the unilateral *logic of capital respect for the* considerations formulated by movements which resulted from the explosion of the contradictions of capitalism. In their unfolding, these compromises effectively toned down the devastating effects of economic alienation and polarisation.

Nevertheless, progressively eroded by its successes, *even if partial by definition*, this logic (of compromise) went down with the collapse of the systems it had legitimated. One can only ask: Has the current return to the triumphalist discourse of liberalism, which believes once again that it is the end of history, only announced a tragic repetition of the earlier drama's successive scenes? Has this neo-liberalism not already, in record time, created an ideological void, amplified policy chaos, and brought together the conditions for reinforced polarisation?

Peoples — the victims of this system — will certainly react. They are already reacting. But what logic will they develop in opposition to that of capital? What type of compromises will they impose upon it? In the most radical hypotheses, what systems will they substitute for capitalism? As a result *of a lack of renewal in* their response to new elements in the permanent challenges of capitalism, the strategies around which popular mobilisation movements had taken place in the preceding period (socialism and nation-building) have lost their credibility today. One can already see what has appeared as a substitute: either the theme of democracy, associated with forms of communalism (ethnic among others), the recognition of which is legitimised by the "right to difference" and sometimes by ecologism; or the theme of cultural, and especially religious, originality.

THE IDEA THAT cultural differences are not *only real and important*, but *fundamental*, that these differences are permanent and stable, that is to say transhistorical, is not a new one. It is, on the contrary, the very basis of a common prejudice of all peoples and at all times. All religions defined themselves in this way — as the end of history, the definitive answer. But progress in critical, social, and historical reflection, which is an universalist advance, and the construction of the social sciences has always been engaged in a systematic struggle against this prejudice of cultural fixity. The question is therefore not to demonstrate once again that this world-view is belied by real history. It is first to know why this absurd idea is being presented *today with so much force* and conviction; and, next, to understand the results of its political success.

Theories of cultural specificity are usually disappointing because they are based on the prejudice that differences are always decisive, while similarities are the result only of coincidence. They define their programme, *a priori*, on this basis. The differences adduced betray the banality of the reflection involved. To say, as Samuel Huntington does in his famous article *Clash of Civilizations*, that these differences are fundamental because they involve domains defining "relations between human beings and God, Nature, Power", is at one and *the same* time *to* slam open doors, reduce cultures to religions, and to suppose that each culture necessarily develops specific concepts of the relations in question, concepts which differ *from one another in a significant* way.

But history shows that these concepts are more flexible than is often believed, and that they found ideological systems which are inscribed in different or similar forms of historical evolution according to circumstances independent of the concepts themselves. Bad culturalists — are there any good ones? — yesterday explained China's backwardness, and today its accelerated development, by *the same* Confucianism. The Islamic world of the tenth century appeared to many historians as not only more brilliant, but also as containing more potential progress than Christian Europe did during the same period. So what has changed to explain the later reversal of positions? Religion (more precisely, its interpretation by society), something else, or both? And how did these different instances of reality react to each other? *Which were the motor forces? So many questions* to which culturalism, even in formulations more rigorous than that of Huntington, which is a particularly crude version, is indifferent.

Furthermore, which "cultures" are we talking about? Those defined by religious space, by language, by nation, by homogenous economic *region*, or by political system? Huntington has apparently chosen "religion" as the basis for his "seven groups", which he defines as Occidental (Catholic and Protestant), Muslim, Confucian (although Confucianism *is not a religion!*), Japanese (Shintoist or Confucian?), Hindu, Buddhist and Orthodox Christian.

Huntington is clearly interested in cultural spaces which potentially present significant divisions in the world today. There is no doubt, for example, about why he needed to separate the Japanese from other *Confucians, Orthodox* Christians from Occidentals (is this because in State Department strategy, which funds Huntington's work, the potential integration of Russia into Europe remains a veritable nightmare?), to ignore Africans, who, whether Christian, Muslim or animist, still have a few *specificities of their own* (Huntington's oversight here perhaps reflects only scientific insouciance and banal racist prejudice, blinding him to their existence), and even Latin Americans (since they are Christians, are they as 'Occidental' as the Occidentals? And, if so, why are they underdeveloped?). It would not be difficult to point out all the absurdities of this badly executed cut-and-paste job, of this badly written page of third-rate Eurocentrism.

Huntington rehearses this elaborate taxonomy to arrive at the astonishing discovery that six of the seven groups are completely ignorant of Western values, among which we find the hodge-podge commonly encountered *in this genre: concepts defining capitalism* ("the market") and democracy (associated with capitalism by *a priori* decree, regardless of historical fact). But does the market fare any worse in non-Western *Japan than in Latin* America or sub-Saharan Africa? Are the market and democracy not recent phenomena in the West itself? Did mediaeval Christianity recognise itself in these so-called transhistorically Western values?

Ideologies — especially religions — are no doubt important. But to say this is nothing more than to utter a platitude. An analysis which situates their functions within a defined historical epoch (the stage which I call tributary, that preceding capitalism) helps us discover the analogies — over and above the specificities — in their relevant functions within this framework. The tributary "cultural spaces" defined in this *framework have not disappeared, far from it.* But they have been deeply transformed from within by modern capitalism (what Huntington calls, wrongly, "Western culture"). I have arrived at the conclusion that this culture of capitalism (and not of "the West") was globally dominant, and that it was this domination that emptied ancient tributary cultures of their content. Where capitalism took developed central forms, modern capitalist culture was internally substituted for ancient cultures, including mediaeval Christianity (in Europe and north America), and that of Japan (which was originally Confucian). On the other hand, in the capitalist peripheries the domination of capitalist culture *did not manage to transform radically and internally* instrumentalise the ancient local cultures. This difference has nothing to do with the specific characters of diverse tributary cultures, but *everything to do with the forms of capitalist* expansion, both central and peripheral.

In its global expansion, capitalism revealed the contradiction between its universalist pretensions and the polarisation it produces in material reality. Emptied of all content, the values invoked by capitalism in the name of universalism (individualism, democracy, freedom, equality, secularism, the rule of law etc.) come to appear as lies to the victims of the system, or as values appropriate only for "Western culture". This contradiction is obviously permanent, but each phase of deepening globalisation (including the one we are now living through) lays bare its violence. The system then discovers, thanks to the pragmatism which characterises it, the means of managing this contradiction. It suffices that each accepts the "difference", that the oppressed cease to demand democracy and individualism, freedom and equality, in order to substitute the "appropriate" values, which are usually the complete opposite. They then interiorise their subaltern status, allowing capitalist expansion to unfold without the reinforced polarisation, which it leads to, encountering any serious obstacle.

Imperialism and culturalism are thus always good bedfellows. The first expresses itself in the arrogant certitude that "the West" has arrived at the end of history, that its formulae for managing the economy (private property, the market), political life (democracy), society (individual freedom) are definitive and unsurpassable. *The real contradictions which may* be observed are decreed imaginary, or are claimed to be produced by absurd resistance to submission to capitalist rationality. For all other peoples, the choice is simple: to accept the values of the West, or to closet themselves in their own cultural specificities. If, as is probable, the first of these two options is impossible, then cultural conflict will occupy the foreground. But in this conflict the dice are loaded: the West will always win, the others *will always be beaten. This is why the others'* culturalist option can not only be tolerated, but can even be encouraged. It only poses a threat to the victims.



Given this situation, and contrary to mythological discourse on the "end of history" and *the "clash of civilizations", critical analysis* seeks to define the real stakes and challenges: riddled with contradictions that cannot be transcended through its own logic, capitalism is only a stage in history, and the values it proclaims are evacuated of questions relevant to its own limits and contradictions.

The self-satisfied discourse of the West does not respond to these challenges, since it deliberately ignores them. But the culturalist discourse of the victims bypasses them as well, since it transfers the conflict outside the field of the real stakes — these it gives to the enemy — to find refuge in the imaginary space of culture. What matter, then, if Islam for instance is firmly *seated at the controls of local society, if within the* hierarchy of the world economy the rules of the system lock Islamic societies into the comprador status of the bazaar? Like fascism yesterday, today's *culturalisms* work through lies: they are in fact means of managing the crisis, despite their pretensions to constitute its solution. But looking forward, and not back, means that real questions must be faced: how are we to combat economic alienation, waste, global polarisation; and how are we to create conditions that allow the genuine advance of universalist values beyond their formulation by historical capitalism?

Simultaneously a critique of cultural heritage, of all cultural heritage, suggests itself. The modernisation of Europe would have been unthinkable without the critique to which Europeans submitted their own past and their own religion. And would that of China have been *begun without the critique of the past, and es*pecially of Confucian ideology, to which Maoism devoted itself? Afterwards, certainly, the heritage — Christian in one case, Confucian in the other — *was re-integrated within the new* culture, but only after it had been radically transformed by a revolutionary critique of the past. On the other hand, in the Islamic world, the stubborn refusal to engage in any critique of the past accompanies (not by coincidence) the continuous degradation of the countries of this cultural space in the world system hierarchy.

IT IS USUAL that having analysed a situation, one then reflects on possible future developments. Gradual erosion of the compromises on which post-war capitalist expansion had unfolded has opened a new phase in which capital, freed from any constraint, has attempted to impose an utopia of world management in conformity with the unilateral logic of its financial interests. This first conclusion leads to the identification of the new dual objectives of the dominant powers' strategy: to deepen economic globalisation, and to destroy the political capacity of resistance on the part of states, nations, people.

Managing the world like a market implies a maximum fragmentation of political forces, or, in other words, a practical destruction of state *forces (an objective which anti-state ideology* attempts to legitimise), the collapse of nations in favour of infra-national communities (ethnic, religious or other), and their weakening in favour of supra-national ideological solidarities (especially religious fundamentalisms), etc. For this idea of global management, the ideal is that *not one state* (*and especially not one* independent military power) worthy of the name should survive — the United States having become the only global policeman — while all other powers are restricted to the modest tasks of daily market management.

The European project itself is conceived in these terms, as the communal management of the market and no more, while beyond its borders maximum fragmentation (as many Slovenias, Macedonias, Chechnyas as possible.) is systematically *sought. Themes of* "democracy" and "peoples' rights" are mobilised to obtain results that cancel peoples' capacity to make use of the democracy and rights in the name of which they have been manipulated. Praise of specificity and difference, ideological mobilisation around infranational (ethnic) or supranational (culturalist) objectives, are a forcing-house for impotent communalism, and force the struggle onto the ground of ethnic cleansing or religious totalitarianism.

In the framework of this logic — and these strategic objectives — the "clash of civilizations" becomes possible, and even desirable. To my mind, Huntington's intervention on the subject *must be read in this way. The author in* question is not an intellectual but a functionary charged with legitimating the United States' political strategies. In the same way as in the past he used to produce texts legitimising support for Third World dictatorships in the name of "development" (before the theme of 'democracy' took over as a means of managing the crisis), he produces today a text which legitimises the means deployed to manage the crisis through the polarisation of conflicts around "cultural incompatibilities". This is nothing less than a strategy which imposes an arena of conflict that guarantees victory to "the West", as I have pointed out.

Events seem to confirm in the immediate term — through the multiplication of ethnic and religious conflicts — the effectiveness of this strategy. But do they therefore prove the thesis of "*natural*" *cultural* conflict? *I* have expressed strong reservations on this subject. Violent affirmations of "specificity" are rarely the spontaneous product of the peoples involved. They are almost always formulated by minorities in power or aspiring to leadership. The means are mobilised to create situations which force acceptance, or even support, for the objectives aimed at by power politics (ethnic cleansing, dictatorship in the name of religion, etc.) It is also clear that the ruling classes made most fragile *by the global evolution of the system* are those which have recourse most frequently to these culturalist or ethnic strategies. This is the case in the countries of eastern Europe, which have been struck by a cataclysm of uncommon proportions. But it is also the case in the Islamic world and in sub-Saharan Africa, also struck off the list of competitive industrial producers and therefore marginalised in the world system. On the other hand, the regions which have coped best with the challenge of globalisation live their "specificity" free of neurosis and do not make of it the central axis of their ideological affirmation and of the legitimation of their political choices. This is the case for China — definitely Confucian — which has no *problem* borrowing from the West, and sometimes even thinking beyond the lines the West has opened up. This does not weaken its nationalism. But in this case *the nationalism is positive, in that it is directed* against the powerful in the system (especially the United States). On the other hand, the nationalisms evoked by the fragile classes aspiring to *leadership* are defined *against* other weak parties, and never against the powerful in the world system. These 'negative' nationalisms are completely functional from the perspective of capitalist crisis management; the former are not.

Local cultures, in their specificity, and in their relations with the world system and the dominant capitalist culture, are not presented according to a single figure that allows the deduction of a general theory, as culturalism would suppose. The true keys capable of explaining the differences between the regions of the world are found *outside* the field of culture. There is no systematic clash of cultures: there are conflicts which are fundamentally of another nature, some of which however include a cultural aspect.

Therefore in order to define a strategy for popular struggle, we must start from an analysis of the contradictions of capitalism and of the forms they take in the particular historical phase we are living through. This strategy is by definition first and foremost a struggle against economic alienation, waste of resources, and global polarisation. And in launching struggles at different levels — local, national, regional and world-wide — *it is necessary to guarantee co*herent action: what has sometimes been summed up in the slogan "Think globally; act locally". Seeking to reconcile realism (the immediate effectiveness of an action) and the long-term perspective (objectives derived from the analysis of the essential contradictions of capitalism) implies a liberation from formalistic oppositions, and a *rapprochement* between "reform," which by definition takes place within the system, and "revolution," which implies breaking out of it. Pursuing reconciliation of this sort would help to emphasise the search for what could be described as "revolutionary reforms," which, without making a complete break with the logic of the system in all its dimensions, would nevertheless transform its impact and thus pave the way for transcending it.

Article written specially for the Weekly in French, and translated by ***Pascale Ghazaleh.***

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Leila El-Hakim (Collages)
Round Gallery of the Fine Arts Syndicate, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0594. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 4.30pm-8.30pm. Until 28 Dec.

Timothy Keating
Sony Gallery, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 28 Dec.
Black and white photographs exhibited under the title Under The Blazing Sun.

Mohamed Taha Hussein (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 28 Dec.

Wagdi Habashi (Paintings) & **Ossama Mohamed** (Glasswork)
Extra Gallery, 3 Al-Nessim St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 30 Dec.

Group Exhibition
Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 30 Dec.

Birth of the Movies
British Council, 192 Al-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 354 3281. Daily, 9am-9pm. Until 31 Dec.

Ali Metwalli (Paintings)
Lobby of Al-Ahram Main Building, Al-Galaa St, Bulaq. Tel 5786 100/400. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 31 Dec.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Documents)
Al-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 1 Jan.

General Exhibition
Zamalek Arts Centre, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swisri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 5 Jan.

The Egypt of the Past
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 6 Jan.
Photography exhibition of monuments and landscapes from the archives of Alberto Manodori and the Egyptian Museum of Torino.

Adel El-Siwi (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 778 623. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 11 Jan.
Recent works by a leading contemporary artist.

Omar Hilal (Photographs)
Lobby of the Jameel Center, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 354 2968. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 15 Jan.

Alfred Stieglitz (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. 3 Jan-29 Feb.
Stieglitz was the first to take pictures at night and to use cameras in the snow and rain; the first to photograph skyscrapers, clouds and airplanes and was one of the pioneers of colour photography.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour Al-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Manet and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4.30pm. Fri 9am-11.30am, 1.30pm-4.30pm.
An outstanding collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the controversial mummies' room.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am, 1pm-4pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses the finest and largest collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab Al-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am, 1.30pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mushrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork and coins, drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluke periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt, from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of work by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr Al-Nil Bridge.

FILMS

Il Tango Della Gelosia (1981)
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 28 Dec, 6pm.

Cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Nine Months
Cairo Sheraton, Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm, midnight. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Sniper
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Al-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 3858358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.


Ali Metwalli

The Distinguished Gentleman
Karim II, as above.

Waterworld
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Spellcaster
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Invasion of Planet Earth (3-D)
Rivoli I, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

American Sholin
Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Dumb & Dumber
Cosmos II, as above.

The Santa Clause
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. MGM, Kolleyat Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 1pm, 3pm & 8pm.

Braveheart
Ramsis Hilton I, as above. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & midnight. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Man Without A Face
MGM, as above. Daily 6pm & 10pm.

Abu Zeid Zamaneh (The Abu Zeid of His Time)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Al-Garage (The Garage)
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Teyour Al-Zalam (Birds of the Dark)
Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Emra'a Hazzat 'Arsh Misr (The Woman Who Shook Egypt's Throne)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

MUSIC

Carmina Burana
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598. 28-30 Dec, 8pm.
Carl Orff's composition performed by the Richard Strauss Conservatoire musicians and the Cairo Opera Ballet Troupe. Conducted by Adel Shalabi.

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 28 Dec, 8pm.
Pianist David Edgar performs.

Drums Concert
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 30 Dec, 8pm.
Ahmed Rabi' performs.

New Year's Eve Concert
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 31 Dec, 8pm.
Soprano Yvonne Barclay and conductor Ahmed El-Saedi with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra perform works by Lehar, Strauss and Zeller.

THEATRE

Al-Sahera (The Sorceress)
National Theatre, Al-Ataba. Tel 579 1778. Daily 9pm.

Al-Ganzir (The Chain)
Al-Salam, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.

Dastour Ya Siadna (With Your Permission, Masters)
Al-Fann, Ramses St. Tel 578 2444. Daily exc Mon, 9.30pm.
A man pays dearly for running against the president in the elections. Play by Mahmoud El-Toukhi, directed by Galal El-Sharkawi, starring Ahmed Bedeir and Nermine El-Fiqi.

Hazz Nawa'em (Nawa'em's Luck)
Al-Houssaper, 16 Al-Ter'a Al-Boulaqeya St. Tel 769 233. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Directed by Rozeiq El-Bahnassawoui, starring Dalal Abdel-Aziz, Mahmoud El-Guindi and So'ad Nasr.

Al-Za'im (The Leader)
Al-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon & Fri 8pm.
Starring Adel Imam in a play scripted by Farouk Sabri.

Al-Gamila wal Wehshin (The Beautiful and the Ugly)
Al-Zamalek, 13 Shagaret Al-Dor St., Zamalek. Tel 341 0660. Daily 10.30pm, exc Fri 8.30pm.
Starring Laila Oloui as the *gamila* and everyone else as the *wehshin*.

Mama America
Qasr Al-Nil, Qasr Al-Nil St, Tahrir. Tel 575 0761. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon 8pm.
With Mohamed Sobhi, director and lead actor, in a socio-political allegory written by Mahdi Youssef.

Louly
Balloon, Corniche Al-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily exc Tues, 9pm.
Musical starring Fayza Kamal, Mohamed El-Helw and Mohamed Nouh.

Ya Nas Efhamou (Try to Understand, People)
Floating Theatre, Fatma Rushdi St. Tel 363 8783. Daily 9.30pm.
Starring Emad Rashad, Dina Abdallah and Hassan Kami.

Ra's Al-Diouk (Cockerel Dance)
Miami, Talaat Harb St. Tel 767 086. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Starring Nagah El-Mougi with Mohamed Abul-Hassan and Aida Riad.

Bahloul fi Istambul (Bahloul in Istanbul)
Hilton Ramsis, Corniche Al-Nil. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm, Sun 8pm.
Samir Ghanem stars with Elham Shahine in yet another comedy.

La...Balash Keda (None of That)
Al-Rihani, Emadeddin. Tel 591 3697. Daily exc Wed 10pm. Tues 8.30pm.
Starring Poussi, Mamdouh Abdel-Alim and Hanan El-Torki.

Hazzemni Ya... (Tie Me Up...)
Al-Gezira, Abdel-Aziz Al-Seoud, Manial. Tel 364 4160. Daily 10pm, Fri 8pm.
A musical involving extensive belly-dancing by Fifi Abdou. Also starring Medhat Saleh and Sherif Mounir.

National Circus
Next to the Balloon Theatre, Al-Nil St, Corniche Al-Nil, Al-Agouza. Tel 347 0612. Daily exc Wed, 9pm.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

METALLIC Tunes is the title of the late **Ali Metwalli**'s exhibition in the foyer of the Al-Ahram building. Though the 50 relief metal sculptures draw on the Islamic artistic tradition, calligraphy in particular, some exhibit a naturalism alien to it.

Paintings by seven Korean artists are on show in the gallery attached to the **Museum of Modern Egyptian Art**. In a variety of media and techniques, they range in style from traditional to modern.

The Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation plays host to paintings — mostly landscapes in what might be termed a pointillist style — by **Ibrahim Ghazalla**, while gallery space at the **Atelier du Caire** is given over to 25 paintings of *moulid* scenes in oil and pastel by **Faris Ahmed Faris**.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Ibrahim Ghazalla

What's in a year? Well, quite a lot really. *Al-Ahram Weekly* talks to leading players in the ...

Exile at home


photo: Sherif Sonbol

Bahaa Taher

Mustafa El-Abbadi, professor of classics, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University:
"An important book that came out recently is Roger S Bagnall's *Egypt in Late Antiquity* [Princeton University Press]. His focus is the social, economic and administrative conditions in Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. A late Roman scholar and papyrologist with numerous publications, his books are an important resource."

Mohamed Abla, painter:
"I believe Bahaa Taher's *Al-Hub Fi Al-Manfa* (Love in Exile) is a very important book; it occasioned many debates on creativity and the experience of exile. One should also mention [the publishing house] Dar Sharqiyat's series of first books by young authors — a very positive initiative."

Ibrahim Aslan, writer:
"The best novels of the year are Bahaa Taher's *Al-Hub Fi Al-Manfa* (Love in Exile) and 'Alaa El-Dib's *Qamar Ala Al-Mustanqa'* (Moon on the Swamp). The most important collection of poetry to appear in 1995 was Mahmoud Darwish's *Limadha Tarakta Al-Hussan Wahidan?* (Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?). Also worth mentioning is Iman Mirsaal's *Mammar Mu'tim Yasluh Lita'alum Al-Raqss* (A Dark Corridor Suitable for Learning to Dance)."

L-r: **Radwa Ashour's** ***Mariama*** **and** ***Al-Rahil***; **'Alaa El-Dib's** ***Qamar Ala Al-Mustanqa'***

Salwa Bakr, writer:
"Among this year's publications, I enjoyed reading a collection of short stories by Sanaa Selaiha, *Ala Atabat Al-Haya* (On the Threshold of Life)."

Mourid Barghouti, poet:
"I appreciated Madbouli's reprinting of the complete works of Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid. I very much enjoyed reading Bahaa Taher's *Al-Hub Fi Al-Manfa* (Love in Exile). The most important Arab collection of poetry this year, I believe, is Mahmoud Darwish's *Limadha Tarakta Al-Hussan Wahidan?* (Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?). A book I consider very important, which appeared in Beirut this year, is Anis Sayegh's *Thalathashar Ayloul* (Thirteenth of September), which takes as its title the date of the signing of the Oslo Agreement. Sayegh, who was the founder and first director of the Palestinian Research Centre in Beirut, writes with rigour and precision."

Sabri Hafez, professor of modern Arabic literature, University of London:
"The most important publication was Bahaa Taher's *Al-Hub Fi Al-Manfa* (Love in Exile). This offered a new approach to positing the problematic of self and other in Arabic literature. It is a major contribution to the development of the Arab novel in the '90s. Another important event was that the Christmas polls in England for literature in translation gave prominence to *Arabian Nights and Days*, the English translation of the Naguib Mahfouz novel by Denys Johnson-Davies. There is another very important novel that appeared this year: Salah El-Din Buja's *Al-Nakhass* (The Slave Trader). This opens new areas of exploration for the Arab novel."

Azza Kararah, professor of English literature, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University:
"Joan Rees' *Writings on the Nile* [Rubican, 1995] was one of the most fascinating books I read. It talks about three women who cruised the Nile in the second half of the nineteenth century: Harriet Martineau, Florence Nightingale and Amelia Edwards. The book deals with the effect Egypt had on these three women. Florence, who always had a sense of vocation, seems to have had a revelation in Karnak Temple. Afterwards there was the Crimean War, and she went as a nurse, which was not considered a proper vocation for women of her background in Victorian times. Amelia was fascinated by the ancient monuments. When she went back to England she devoted the rest of her life to raising funds to help preserve the monuments and helped found the Egypt Exploration Society. Both Harriet and Florence were very excited about the religion of ancient Egypt — they were broad-minded, free-thinkers."

Sami Khashaba, journalist and general manager of the State Theatre Establishment:
"The most important novels of the year are parts two and three of Radwa Ashour's trilogy: *Mariama* and *Al-Rahil* (Departure). In poetry, Fatma Qandil's *Samt Qita'at Qutn Mubtalla* (The Silence of a Wet Cotton Wad) was the most important collection of the year. The most important collection of short stories was Reda El-Bahaat's *Tuqous Basharia* (Human Rituals). In the field of political theory my choice is Sayed Yassin's *Al-Wa'i Al-Tarikhi Wa Al-Thawra Al-Kawnia* (Historical Consciousness and Global Revolution)."

Samia Mehrez, professor of Arabic literature, American University in Cairo:
"Here in Egypt, the trilogy of Radwa Ashour is certainly one of the best things I've read this year. An important project, elsewhere, is the translation series of Arab women's novels that has come out of Garnet Publishing House, supervised by Fadia Fakir. The books already published are Salwa Bakr's *The Golden Chariot*, Hoda Barakat's *The Stone of Laughter*, Liana Badr's *The Eye of the Mirror* and Hamida Nana's *The Homeland*. There is also *Texts of Power* by the Bengali social scientist Partha Chatterjee [Minnesota Press, 1995]. His work as a Bengali — someone from the so-called Third World — is highly relvant to our situation and we have a lot to learn from his research. Otherwise, one of the important things is Dar Sharqiyat's policy of publishing the very young, like Iman Mirsaal and others."

Fatma Moussa, professor of English literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University:
"This year, I very much enjoyed reading a commemorative edition of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. It was published by Secker and Warburg, who in 1945, brought out the first edition, after many other publishers had turned it down. This edition gives a history of the publication and also includes an introduction by Orwell, originally written for a Ukranian translation. This commemorative edition, a coffee-table book, is beautifully illustrated by Ralph Steadman. Otherwise, I would add Bahaa Taher's *Al-Hub Fi Al-Manfa* (Love in Exile) — a very striking novel."

Amina Rachid, professor of French literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University:
"My choice of novels — *Al-Hub Fi Al-Manfa* (Love in Exile), by Bahaa Taher and parts two and three of Radwa Ashour's trilogy, *Mariama* and *Al-Rahil* (Departure). Also Mahmoud El-Wardani's novel *Taam Al-Hariq* (Flavour of Fire). Of the short story collections published this year, there was May El-Telmisani's *Naht Mutakarrir* (Recurrent Carvings). As for novels published abroad, George Semprun's *L'Ecriture ou la mort* (Writing or Death) [Gallimard, 1995] was impressive. An interesting book was Marlene Nasr's *Sourat Al-'Arabi Fi Kutub Al-Ta'lim Al-Firinsiya* (The Image of the Arab in French Textbooks)."

Gamil Shafik, painter and illustrator:
"Among the novels I liked most was 'Alaa El-Dib's *Qamar Ala Al-Mustanqa'* (Moon on the Swamp), which is very economically written. I also enjoyed Bahaa Taher's *Al-Hub Fi Al-Manfa* (Love in Exile) — it is a very poetic novel which gives a moving voice to the sufferings of the intellectual. I also enjoyed Ossama Al-Aref's play *Iskindiriya Bahrik Agayeb* (Alexandria, Your Sea is Wonderous) which I saw recently in Beirut."

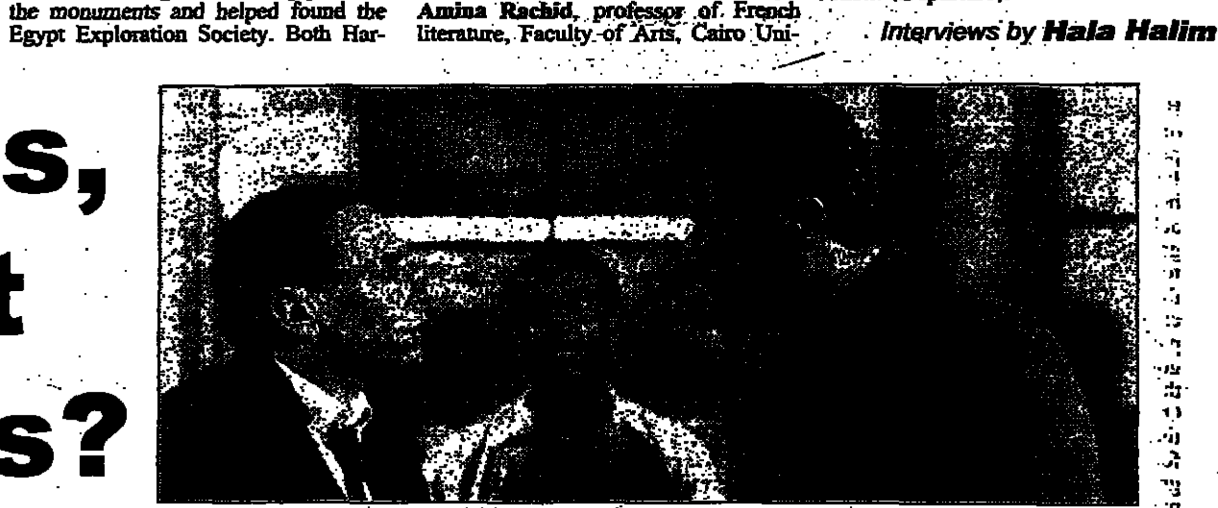
Ghali Shukri, critic and editor-in-chief of *Al-Qahira* monthly journal:
"The best novel of 1995 was Bahaa Taher's *Al-Hub Fi Al-Manfa* (Love in Exile), an original and poetic novel. Another important book that appeared this year was Sayed Yassin's *Al-Wa'i Al-Tarikhi Wa Al-Thawra Al-Kawnia* (Historical Consciousness and Global Revolution). Yassin is remarkably well read and his book is very relevant to all those preoccupied with issues of identity."

Adel El-Siwi, painter:
"I enjoyed reading Abdou Gubeir's novel *'Utlat Radwan* (Radwan's Vacation). I also liked Iman Mirsaal's *Mammar Mu'tim Yasluh Lita'alum Al-Ragss* (A Dark Corridor Suitable for Learning to Dance). I also read *Yawmiat 'Abqari*, Ahmed Omar Shahine's translation of Salvador Dali's *Diary of a Genius: An Autobiography*."

Latifa El-Zayyat, novelist and professor of English literature, Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University:
"My choice of novels is Bahaa Taher's *Al-Hub Fi Al-Manfa* (Love in Exile), and Radwa Ashour's *Mariama* and *Al-Rahil* (Departure)."

Interviews by **Hala Halim**

Crisis, what crisis?


Toyour Al-Zalam **(Birds of the Dark), directed by Sherif Arafa**

Khairi Bishara, director:
"To start with the negative aspects of 1995, I think the decline of production in the Egyptian film industry is becoming very alarming. From a one time average of 60 films a year, the figure in 1995 has fallen to 10 films. Also, the industry is lacking basic services. There is not enough money, no machines, virtually nothing. We were told that we were receiving the latest equipment but it is untrue. It was a form of deceit.
On the other hand, the few films that were released in 1995 were far less commercial and low-budget than in the recent past. Also, three new directors made their debut on the film scene this year. Despite the much publicised crisis, all three films were actually very good. It is a very positive and promising aspect of 1995.
For 1996, I cannot predict anything, but I hope that the state will start to take cinema a little more seriously. It has to understand that cinema is not only an art, it is also a very powerful and potentially lucrative industry."
Best film of the year: *Afarit Al-Asphalt* (The Asphalt Demons).

Youssef Chahine, director:
"To start with, a very odd characteristic of the cultural scene this year is the increasing resort to law, as individuals filed *hesba* suits in the courts, with the aim of silencing artists and intellectuals. The surprising thing is the contrast in the positions of the judges: one judge says that the law allows for *hesba* suits, so *Al-Muhager* is banned, and sentences are passed saying that Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid be separated from his wife. Think, too, of the suit against Naguib Mahfouz. Then another judge rejects these law suits. It is all very confusing. One really needs legal clarification.
Another important issue is the treatment of archive material. Three of my films are in urgent need of preservation. I have been trying hard to get them restored, and have even offered to buy the rights back myself, but to no avail. The state refuses, claiming the films are state property.
One positive thing this year is the emergence of a number of young directors, whose films show great promise."

Beshir El-Dik, scriptwriter:
"There is a general pessimism among those involved in cinema. The media harps on about the so-called crisis of the film industry. I don't believe any of this is valid. The Egyptian film industry is fine, proof of which is that it has presented three good new directors, namely Ossama Fawzy, director of *Afarit Al-Asphalt* (Asphalt Demons), Magdi Ahmed Ali, director of *Ya Donia...Ya Gharami* (My Life...My Passion) and Amali Bahnassi, director *Al-Tahwila* (Railway Junction)."
Best film of the year: *Emra'a Hazzat 'Arsh Misr* (The Woman Who Shook Egypt's Throne)

Nader Galal, director:
"The most striking phenomena in the film industry this year is the dearth of new films, though the few that there were were of high quality.
1995 is the first year that there was a marked absence of low-budget productions. But there was variety this year: traditional and non-traditional films. They are all quite acceptable, if few in number. A chronic problem is the crisis in the Egyptian film industry which has resulted from bad foreign distribution."
Best film of the year: *Toyour Al-Zalam* (Birds of the Dark), *Emra'a Hazzat 'Arsh Misr* (The Woman Who Shook Egypt's Throne)

Rafiq El-Sabban, critic:
"The emergence of new, bold and innovative ideas in the films that we have seen this year is definitely a point worth mentioning. New directors have made their appearance in the film sphere with very good productions, based on innovative and powerful scripts. The ideas and themes they have put forward are refreshing, constituting a bold approach to current problems.
But, on the other hand, the censors' strong interference in the medium and their attempts to supervise or even control freedom of expression, along with the ever-growing clash between artists and censors, is a rather grim side of 1995.
For 1996 I only want to say that if films are given the chance to continue on the same wave of creativity, boldness and innovation the audiences that had once abandoned cinema for television will come racing back to it."
Best film of the year: *Al-Ragul Al-Thalith* (The Third Man), *Al-Bahr Biedhak Leih* (Why Does The Sea Laugh) and *Toyour Al-Thalam* (Birds Of The Dark).

Mohamed Shebl, director, critic:
"The worst event of 1995 was the statement, made by Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni, implying that the ministry had nothing to do with cinema. Cinema subsequently came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Housing. Nothing worse could have happened to the medium.
Then again, Minister of Information Safwat El-Sherif announced that he would allocate a substantial annual budget to support Egyptian films. This might eventually lead to a co-production system that could well be very beneficial in the long run. It means that directors would no longer be on their own and will no longer be subject to the whims of the distributors. It is particularly good news as low-budget films virtually died in 1995. Big directors are coming back with great films for 1996. The general quality of films has and will improve. Many cinema theatres have been renovated.
My main hope for 1996 is the improvement of the studios and the termination of the "Hollywood" style: the presence of stars should stop being the main reason behind a film's success. In this respect, I call upon the public to help us overcome this terrible phenomenon."
Best film of the year: *Ya Donia...Ya Gharami* (My Life... My Passion)

Said Shimi, cinematographer:
"Over the past year there was a dearth in production. It is a dearth caused by conditions over which the Egyptian film industry has no control. To cover its expenses it relies on Arab markets; when Arab distributors do not buy Egyptian films their prices drop and they are bought cheaply by Arab satellite channels. As a result no more than 16 Egyptian films have been released in any recent year. I believe that this has created a sense of solidarity among filmmakers who do not want to see foreign markets controlling the industry. State intervention may well improve the situation. State support could take several forms including the construction of new cinema theatres and cooperative projects with the Ministry of Culture and television."

Interviews by **Hani Mustafa** *and* **Injy El-Kashef**

worlds of film, art and literature about the highs and lows of 1995, while our critics review the main events of the year

Proust, no thanks

David Blake *unwraps a musical year*



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Cairo Opera Ballet Company in rehearsal: Dance programmes were among the Opera House's most popular offers

This is music. No recollections or recriminations or mortuary rituals necessary. It's hi and good-bye. There is no time for anything else because music, alone of the arts, is on the move out of this century and already into the year 2000. It devoured its own classical and avant-garde modes years ago and, armed with a tough digestion and an understanding public, is moving into areas as yet unnamed. Such fluidity is just not done! But music is doing it. The visual arts, once the spearpoint of world culture, have moved into kitchen decoration — charming, warm, coy — but music, hydra-headed, has already left for places yet to be imagined.

Behind the flower beds and tree shapes is the much derided Cairo Opera House. It is not the only source of music in Cairo, but it is the first by right of inheritance and a show place for most of the best efforts which are springing up. Anything is something and something is better than nothing, so since the Opera House has begun to change into the semblance of what it is supposed to be, it deserves all the support Cairo can offer. Lights shine from it, intermittent but bright. There are complaints, but that is part of the musical scene everywhere and not the fault of any individual management.

The ravening years devour almost everything but musical visitations. Most go the way of all the leaves of time but some stick. These are some stickers for 1995.

Beginning in January, Wissam Bustani's flute recital, helped at the piano by Amira Fouad, was astounding. In the same month of January, Victoria Postnikova swooped down upon Cairo, formidable and perfect, with her husband assisting at one of her revelations, *Chopin's first piano concerto*. She dismissed mere words — was simply a goddess — hovered somewhat and then took off. Other hoverers in Cairo were Antje Weithaas (violin), Gerald Fauth (piano) and Michael, son of Karl Sanderling (cello), all from the Hans Eisler Hockshule fur Musik, Berlin. They demonstrated school class and excitement, outside the range of all but a chosen few.

Still in January came one of the finest musical things of the year, put forth by the Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra under Sherif Moheiddin — the complete *Concerti Grossi* of Handel. Sheer pleasure. The allure, dynamism and ever-coruscating colours and inventions of Handel brought him dazzlingly near to the beginning of the millennium. This was a festival of wit and shine.

End of January brought *La Bohème* with Youssef El-Sisi giving a raw, searing demonstration of *tu che le vanita*. It had heart-rending flashes and the end was a tolling of bells for everyone. Ratiba El-Hefni gave her greatest Cairo Mimi, helped by a disarming show of youthful incomprehension at the merciless thrust of time by the exultant young Bulgarian tenor Kostadin Andreev. Another diva, Nogah Sallam — a voice from the lebanese hills and who flashed her bejewelled person — shone in one of the nights of the Festival of Arabic Music.

From some other planet in February came a Nubian troupe who sang soft, slow and comforting, followed by the Gouzour Percussion who played loud, quick and terrifying. They blew the roof off Zamalek.

Middle March showed the *musical operatic event of the year*. No question. *Cosi Fan Tutte* came with the Vienna Opera Group from the parent Staatsoper and Michael Temme with the Cairo Symphony playing at its best. Leo Plettner produced. This *Cosi Fan Tutte* was better than those seen in Salzburg, Vienna, New York and London. The beauties and ironies, visual and vocal, the joys and splendours of its uniqueness will haunt all subsequent *Cosis* to come. *High over the bay of Naples we* look down and below palpitates the city of San Carlo floating in a strange, hydrangea blue sea like a night blooming cactus. The Opera House had been bewitched.

Two happenings in March gilded the month. The first was Ivan Filev conducting Erminia Kamel's first *Giselle* in Abdel-Moneim Kamel's production, with an ever-improving Sergy Gorbachov. The second happening — *Salma Sadek came to Cairo. She blazed into J.S. Bach's chaccone in D minor* from the second *Partita* — silky, sulky, dark and massive: She is a spiritual sister of Ginette Neveu. The Sibelius concerto is waiting for her.

Then something very moving. The Opera, no matter what, clings to Verdi's *Ballo in Maschera*. It is touching because it is one of the most cunningly contrived, treacherous and perfect of Verdi's works and needs a cast of steely Verdi veterans to elevate it to the exalted realms in which it belongs. With a far from perfect cast, it strode along with Filev producing many sparks from the orchestra and the cast doing their best. That it is still in the repertoire helps ennoble the Opera House. Iman Moustafa sang one of her "wait and see" roles. She moved, she tries, she will conquer.

End of March — an arrow to the centre. An all El-Saedi night to remember. He opened the concert with the adagio from the *10th Symphony* of Mahler. One of El-Saedi's triumphant plunges into angst and the fervour of Mahler's benighted hallucinatory melodies.

April: the National Symphony Orchestra of South Africa conducted by Richard Kock brought Mozart's *piano concerto no 20 in D minor*. Surendran Reddy was more than adequate at the piano. He and the orchestra gave a performance that crackled and fizzed like water on fire.

May, the month of flowers, showed the Cairo Opera Ballet in a new production of *Swan Lake*. Birds, black and white, in Abdel-Moneim's production. Also in May, Cairo Symphony Orchestra with the young nomadic conductor Ashraf Benjamin, performed the Schumann *piano concerto* with Dina El-Leithy. Both she and Benjamin — young, romantic and brisk both — gave a touching Schumann. This young girl got to the heart of the music that *many a seasoned veteran overlooks in his haste to* get on with the personal ego trip — exit Schumann. With El-Leithy, it is simple music and you hear Schumann at his best.

In mid-May Hesse and Eichendorff poems set the words and mood of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs*. Present this night were the fiends who stood behind Strauss and who created the troubles which this music *sets in an orchestra — in this case the Cairo Symphony* conducted by El-Saedi and with singer Iman Mustafa. The fiends were dispelled. The Cairo Symphony, El-Saedi and Mustafa understood the celebratory nature of *these songs. The performance was balanced on a hair.* They achieved the high-flowing misty *melismata* expected. Mustafa's big dramatic voice was generally held in check. She had no trouble with the high line. In the *last song, however, the one about the lark, she gave way* to her dramatic inclination. We were unprepared — gone were the *Last Songs* and there before us stood Strauss's *Electra*.

On 21 May was an all piano concerto of pupils of Demidov. No crash or bash here. Mahmoud Meckheimer played the Lizst *concerto no 2 in A major*. Comforting to hear Lizst played from what was once called the heart. He penetrated deeply into the elegiac but forward-looking music. Lizst without backache or heartbreak. Iman Amin was sturdy, not flashy, in the Gershwin *Rhapsody in Blue* — in full command. Dina El-Leithy again played the Schumann and Wael Farouk showed where virtuousity leaves off and the spirit takes over in Mozart. Lastly, completely in possession of all its requirements, Sameh El-Mahmoudi gave the Tchaikovsky *B flat minor piano concerto*. He was astonishing in his command, without show or fuss or stylistic gimmicks. He raged through the well known piece. No angst, but lots of spirit and defiance. Tchaikovsky, no wet blanket.

A hurricane then struck the Opera House: Fathi El-Khamsi's *Symphony no 1* and Ian Krousse's *Rhapsody for violin and orchestra*. Hassan Sharara, violinist and Cairo Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jan Robertson, were a sensation. Sharara, for whom the violin piece was written, performed everything possible to perform on the violin. Weird, elemental music, the tonality torn to pieces in long strands of sinister night music. Foul fiends, total chaos into which Sharara, leaving his well-dressed image, let himself go. The audience was in rapture.

A surprising variation in flamenco was brought with the Spanish Company of Cristina Hoyos. Her production was a dream, dream-like — wonderful browns, blacks, hues of blood, moonlight splurged across the stage. She is no steam-roller woman in bloody flounces and arched style, no scorpion, but a pheasant, a bird of pride. The aggression was left to her men — Galia in a succession of *waistcoats* and Paco Arriaga, a tremendous guitarist.

Moushira Issa did the Chopin concerto her way. It was no way for Chopin, but, torn to shreds, it became a battlefield for artist versus instrument. Did she love or hate *her piano? Chopin had no clue. Issa is always brave*, always alone, and always wrong. But she's right to do it her way. It was full house in the Main Hall and her personal way of playing lit the house.

Summer months bring sky-light concerts. Inas Abdel-Dayem has visual and musical appeal. In Mahler she floats perfectly. Also during the summer, two productions of Walid Aouni: *Coma* and *Elephants Hide to Die*, *both showing command of all branches of theatre.* Decor, lighting, movement — difficult, often precarious, but always of strange emotional appeal. His choreography follows no one. He invents to fit his own narratives *and the members of his dance company are tall*, wonderful and unique.

Good things came fast as the year rushed by. The New Citadel Arena was opened with the Akhenaten Chamber Orchestra. A sensational place but like a huge felucca with a great gash down the middle of the sail — wind with nothing else, certainly no sound acoustics.

Aidas came and went. Nothing painful.

Movers, the Swiss dance troupe, gave the best programme of modern dance seen in Cairo for years. They were witty, ironic, crazy, scatological and very beautiful. Not seen before and done with passionate grace.

Almost for Christmas came Yasser Mukhtar. He has displayed his riveting technique as a pianist in Beethoven. He plays things you have heard before but they come at you strange and disturbing. This is some gift. At the keyboard he can do everything. The technique is shivery. People, now that Horowitz is dead, do not do downward runs at Mukhtar's speed, with each note perfect. He never shows off and his eye is on the sparrow, not the audience. Though he can make incomprehensible pieces clear, Lizst eludes him, Schubert bypasses him and Prokofiev seems too easy.

One last concert, the most alluring of all. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra. Caroline Dumas, soprano and Miguel Graca Moura, conductor, gave the songs from Ravel's *Scheherezade*. Graca Moura made miracles. Dumas wove her lines with soft gleams of beauty. The orchestra surged in waves of sound, incomparably nuanced. Who are these people, Dumas, Graca Moura and the orchestra? Better not enquire, they have their own light to disperse over a grey world. They are as sure of themselves as the art they practice. There will be no need or worry for tomorrow.

Plain Talk

The new year is catching up with us. We seem to have run out of resolutions but not of hopes. One such hope is to see Cairo the world's cultural capital.

UNESCO *has already* proposed Cairo as cultural capital of the Arab World. What qualifies a city to deserve such an accolade? *Leaving* aside the permanent landmarks, Cairo has always been a venue for cultural events. Just looking back at the cultural events of 1995 leaves one breathless.

First there was the Cairo Opera House with its myriad of operas, ballets and concerts of classical and Arab music. It presented Egyptian artistic troupes and leading companies from Europe — a rich bouquet with something for everyone.

The theatre this year witnessed a revival. One of the most welcome achievements therein was the restoration of the Goumhuriya Theatre which, between the burning down of the old Opera House and the construction of the new one, had been the main venue of artistic life in Cairo, but which then fell into a sad state of neglect for many years. It is now under the directorship of Nasser El-Ansari, Chairman of the Board of the Opera House. Many other state theatres have also experienced a revival after years of stupor and are now presenting new plays by young, up and coming dramatists in addition to plays from their classical repertoire.

Cairo in 1995 witnessed numerous international cultural events. The Festival of Experimental Theatre, with dozens of countries participating, gave the Egyptian public a chance to keep abreast of the most recent trends in world drama. The 19th Cairo International Film Festival, too, was a great success. A number of leading stars from all over the world participated and the international jury was headed by leading film star Shaabana Azmi. The Film Festival has certainly established itself as an international cultural event.

Perhaps the most important event in the field of plastic arts was the opening of the original Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil Museum in Giza which for years had been used as presidential office space. The restored museum houses the collection of one person and includes paintings by Delacroix, Monet, Courbet, Rodin, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Daumier among others.

In addition to these major cultural events, there were festivals of TV, of Egyptian feature films, of Arab music, an *international festival of songs*, a children's book fair and so on. These are only samples of what Cairo had to offer in one *year. If these do not qualify a* city to be a cultural capital of the world, what would?

Mursi Saad El-Din

From the wings

Nehad Selaiha takes a view of the stage

But for a blessed few stirring events and a handful of exciting shows, 1995 would have been a very poor and dull year indeed, theatrically speaking. By far, the most thrilling and a significant event has been the decision of the minister of culture to finally acknowledge the existence of the free theatre groups. At last, these groups will be able to apply for sponsorship to the Cultural Development Fund through a small, enlightened committee of writers, critics and directors — all known for their sympathies with the free theatre movement. The project got underway some months ago and data on most of the functioning groups is now available at the Fund. Of the ten production projects already submitted to the committee two were unconditionally approved, four will be reviewed after discussion with the groups proposing them, one was rejected for its palpable weakness, and three were disqualified and referred to the state theatre establishment since they were submitted by professionals working in the mainstream theatre. The committee's terms of reference are not limited to the financial support of free theatrical activity: it has also, within its rights, the capacity to create opportunities for artistic education, training and development — particularly in the provinces where such opportunities are sorely lacking. One of the first decisions the committee took - quite a significant one — was to do all in its power to guarantee for its protegés freedom of thought and expression. This entails finding some lawful means to avoid the censoring of its sponsored productions.

But even if censorship — in one form or another — proves unavoidable, one may be sure that the committee will fiercely battle to soften its rigours. At last, thanks to the Cultural Development Fund, the free and amateur theatre groups and individuals will have a staunch ally; and although it is yet early days to judge of the projects chances of success, one has every reason to hope that it will prove, at least, a step in the right direction.

Another positive, important event for the Egyptian theatre in 1995 has been the change of leadership in the state theatre *establishment*. With Sami Khashaba at the helm and Hoda Wasfi manning (womaning?) the National, there is the prospect of a prosperous wind. Earlier this month, they talked to the *Weekly* about their plans for the future and only the most inveterate of cynics can doubt their credibility. Already, the state theatres look cleaner and brighter. The National has had its lighting and sound systems improved, thanks to the cooperation of three French experts whom Dr Wasfi promptly summoned as soon as she assumed her new position, and both *Mohamed Farid* and Al-Salam theatres have undergone an extensive cleaning and repainting operation. This is only a temporary measure, however, as Khashaba frankly admits. A coat of paint alone can be a *dangerous* thing; but Khashaba intends to attend to all the cracks and holes underneath; and judging by the production programmes laid out for every theatre, one can look forward, with a measure of confidence, to a theatrically fruitful new year.

In another state-run theatrical field, the Popular and Folk Arts Sector, a bright spot and promising venture has been the newly founded *Al-Ghad (The Morrow)* theatre troupe. It started its activities in the provinces in September, during the Experimental Theatre Festival, and on 19th December, the minister of culture opened its new, permanent, elegant home *next to the Balloon theatre. The troupe's six* productions so far will be playing there alternately, and for 1996, the troupe is preparing almost double that number of shows. Next door, at the Balloon, Lully, an Egyptian version of Bizet's *Carmen* has been playing to large, enthusiastic audiences for nearly three months and promises to run well into the new year.

Looking over the theatrical landmarks of 1995, one cannot help pausing to reflect on the significance and future ramifications of the activities of the new censor, Dr. Dorriya Sharaf Eddin. She started her career by *putting everybody's back up* when she insisted categorically on banishing belly dancing and 'low' offensive language from the stage, regardless of their artistic propriety and function. One *could see her point and also, perhaps, guess at her* good intentions; but one could not stomach her high-handed, castigatory moral tone. Most of her published statements, through no fault of hers, per*haps, seemed designed to appeal to the bourgeois* sense of decorum and dangerously to smack of recalcitrant philistinism. Sensitive, enlightened and tolerant as she may be in reality, Dr Sharaf Eddin *was tripped up on several occasions - particularly in* the course of an open debate with a select group of film and theatre artists, held by one of the national newspapers - and made to appear as the guardian of *narrow middle class morality. Her confrontation* with the theatrical world came to a symbolic head when Galal El-Sharqawi's *Dastoor Ya Siadna* — an innocuous play about an ordinary citizen who decides to pit himself against the president in the elections was suddenly banned. The issue here was political, rather than moral freedom and, therefore, a less problematic rallying cause. The Experimental Theatre Festival was close at hand and the Acting Professions Union rose up in arms and threatened to wreck it by boycotting it completely. The press too, particularly the opposition papers, was harshly critical of the banning, and within a few days the decision was revoked. *Dastoor* recovered its licence and was back on stage as a box-office hit because of *the publicity. The ill-advised skirmish* cost the censor's office some public loss of face and many valuable plumes. Regardless of the artistic value of the play (very modest in my view) and its glib verbal (rather than intellectual) audacity, *Dastoor* has undoubtedly scored a victory against censorship, which makes it one of the most significant shows of '95 — an honour it did not work for but had thrust upon it. In the following months there were minor clashes with the Censor when some actors and actresses were had before the law for deviation from the approved text and for using 'obscene language and gestures'. Belly dancing, however, has continued in full vigour in the commercial theatre despite faint grumbling from the censor every now and then.

Other theatrical landmarks of '95 have been the decision of the Cultural Palaces Organisation to issue a theatre magazine, the appointment of the distinguished playwright Alfred Faragas s chairman of *the theatre committee of the Supreme Cultural* Council; the 7th Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre which featured productions from different countries based on Shakespearean plays *and a preponderance of female acting talent*; and the holding of the first non-governmental International theatre festival in Amman.

The Amman Festival, which was held in March, *was only the beginning of what promises to be an* ambitious project for pooling and coordinating the forces and energies of all free theatre groups in the Arab world. The Fawanees (Lanterns) members, the *Jordanian group who initiated the first festival, are* already deep in consultation with the Egyptian Al-Warsha group over the next festival which is planned as a joint enterprise with funding from vari*ous non-governmental sources, including the Ford* Foundation. Al-Warsha members, who have had a busy year performing their *Tides of Night*, giving many story-telling evenings and conducting several *workshops in various places (ranging from* Upper Egypt to the northern coast) are deeply excited and brightly optimistic about the prospects of cooperation with sister groups in the Arab world and are hoping to be able to host an international free theatre festival in Egypt within the next few years.

Like most years, however, 1995 has had its share of depressing theatrical news. The most depressing *perhaps was Dr. Wasfi's withdrawal from the di*rectorship of CIFET and its board. It is quite disheartening that a person who has helped found this festival and set it on its feet from the start, and who has put so much into it over the years, should be brought to the point of resignation and allowed to leave without so much as a verbal public acknowledgement of her services and contribution. I do hope that next year's CIFET will show a sign of gratitude to Wasfi; it is only common decency.

Equally frustrating for many(though a relief for some) was the postponement of the Arab Theatre Encounter (originally scheduled for December '95) to March '96. Looking on the bright side, one can regard the delay as an opportunity for better prepara*tion and tighter organisation or, simply*, as a welcome reprieve from the fangs of the pack of historical plays (the proposed theme this year is history) that will soon be unleashed upon us. Another source of disappointment this year was the Carthage Festival in Tunis which was a pale shadow of its former self. Worse still, when the Egyptian entry in the contest — Karam Mutawe's production of Abul 'Ela Al-Salamouni's *Book of Kine* — failed to win a prize, an ugly row erupted between Mutawe and one theatre reviewer who had attacked him mercilessly and torn the production to shreds. Mutawe accused the reviewer of using offensive language and casting aspersions on him out of personal spite and regarded the article as libelous. The last time I heard of this ugly business, Mutawe was threatening to take the matter to the law. But enough of theatrical gossip and let us get down to the record of the Egyptian theatre in '95.

If we compare the performance of all the theatres, *state-run or otherwise, in terms of the number of* productions, their variety and quality, Al-Hanager Centre will emerge as a clear winner. Besides the ill-fated *Book of Kine*, its eight productions included *Osiris, an experimental opera in the Arab musical* form of the *maqamat*; a limpid classical production of Tawfiq El-Hakim's *Scheherezade*, directed by Gamil Rateb; a thrilling youthful adaptation of his *Cave-dwellers by the Shrapnel experimental group*, under the title *Briaska II*; Genet's *Les Bonnes*, directed with a pronounced social accent by the Iraqi Jawad Al-Asadi; *Rashomon*, an American play based *on Japanese stories*; an Egyptian classical tragedy by Mahmoud Diab, hitherto unperformed *A Land Where Flowers do not Grow*; and an Egyptian monodrama, *The Stage*, designed to showcase the virtuosity of TV actor Hussein El-Shirbeeni.

El-Tali'a has also contributed eight productions (actually six if we discount *The Rule of Scheherezade* and *100 Boutiques* which really belong in '94); of these, however, only four are artistically noteworthy: the Egyptian premiere of Mikhail Roman's *Tomorrow, Next Summer*; Intisar Abdel-Fattah's *Concerto* (which represented Egypt at the CIFET contest); Nasir Abdel-Moneim's version of Arrabal's *Le Labyrinthe*; and Ra'fat El-Dweiri's stirring production of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* under the title *The Magic Flute*. *The Box of Masks*, an *endlessly rambling*, confused play by some unknown Spanish author, and *Beware*, a political cautionary parable by Mahfouz Abdel-Rahman, can be safely consigned to oblivion despite some good act*ing by Ahmed Halawa and Ala' Quqa in the former* and Taysir Fahmi in the latter.

The performance of the National, the Modern and the Youth state theatre companies was deplorable in comparison. While the National's output consisted of only one major production, Sa'dalla Wanus's *Historical Miniatures*, and a weak and shortened version of Unamuno's *The Other*, hastily trumped up for the Experimental Festival, the Modern opted for small, low-budget productions throughout the year, producing four miserably dull and insipid one-act plays in succession. The worst was definitely the last — an incredibly puerile moral tale in verse preaching the virtues of birth control among other things. The one production which could have saved the rep*utation of the Modern this year, an allegedly un*published play by Mikhail Roman called *The Ants and the System*, was literally in tatters when I saw it and played for less than two weeks. The night I went, I was completely baffled by the first part which seemed to consist of two completely unrelated situations and sets of characters. I hoped that the second part would help me fit the pieces together; but there was no second part. In the interval, the dancers and extras who had not been paid a penny since the beginning of rehearsals decided to go on strike. The sudden decision was partly prompted, no doubt, by the fact that the vast Al-Salam auditorium held only ten viewers, including some of the stage-hands. A few days later I went back to see it, but it had sunk without a trace. The experience left me wondering if the verbal hotchpotch I had listened to in the first part was really part of a complete manuscript as the director claimed. Since then, I have heard it whispered that the performed text had been put together by the director himself from several *fragments and unfinished manuscripts*.

As for the Youth theatre company, it remained dormant for a substantial part of '95, waking up only when the Experimental Festival knocked at the door. *In a sudden spurt of energy, it hastily put together* three muddled and half-baked shows, Camus' *Le Siege*, Tawfik El-Hakim's *Pygmalion* and Sa'id Hagag's highly derivative ludicrous fabrication *As It Is*. *They were all predictably stunted and severely* anaemic. No wonder that Mustafa Sa'd's vigorous and imaginative tour de force, *Do Not Try*, looked quite freakish in the setting of the Youth theatre. Unfortunately, the same artistic drought which blighted the Youth spread to the Puppets, the Children and the Comedy theatre companies. Artistically, their score was almost nil.

The Popular and Folk Arts Sector, on the other hand, was reasonably productive with two hit musicals, *Agaveh* and *Luly* (the latter is still running), plus the six productions of its newly founded Al-Ghad Troupe, a short, light, romantic musical for young people called *The Sweet Bird of Love* (I personally found it cloyingly sentimental, but then I am not young), and some educational performances for school children. Under the management of Abdel-Ghaffar Ouda, the Balloon Theatre (the base of the Popular Arts Sector) has become a bustling, thriving venue with the kind of popular appeal that only the good private theatre companies enjoy. These private companies, however, have not acquitted themselves well in '95. Apart from Galal El-Sharqawi's *Dastoor* and *West Side Story* there was nothing worth *writing home about. Still, the best of last year's fare* is still on offer — Adel Imam's *Al-Za'im*, Mohamed Subhi's *Mama America* and Fifi Abdou's *Hazimni Ya Babu*.

A theatrical review of '95 would be incomplete if it fails to mention the few visiting shows brought over by the foreign cultural centres. This year, the British Council treated us to a beautifully evocative production of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western* World from the repertoire of the Communicado Scottish theatre company and the Italian Cultural Centre hosted first a production of Marinetti's rarely performed *Il Tamburo Di Fuoco* (Drum of Fire) at Al-Hanager Centre, then Goldoni's *La Locandiera*, performed by La Compagnia La Plautina di Roma, at Al-Goumhuriya theatre. The former, directed by Enrico Frattaroli as a vocal concerto with inspired dynamic lighting proved an intense, thrilling theatrical experience. It was at once savage and deeply sensitive, violent, poetic and highly polished. Predictably, *La Locandiera*, which followed within days, though funny and elegantly executed, seemed tame and somewhat trite in comparison.

This year, against my will and better sense, I have shamefully neglected the provinces. One of my new year's resolutions, therefore, is to hare off to the countryside at the slightest theatrical provocation. Who knows what treasures I might find there in 1996?

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life










112 The writings of a famous author and the increasing autonomy and influence Egypt gained within the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century paved the way for the emergence of Egyptian national consciousness. A landmark court ruling in 1898 spelled out the terms of Egyptian citizenship. In this installment of his chronicle of modern Egyptian history as seen through the pages of *Al-Ahram*, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizq** looks at efforts to establish an explicit definition of the Egyptian nationality

"No one can deny that Egypt is a splendid, if not the most splendid nation. It is broad and bounteous, as though furnished with the charms of this world and engraved with the images of paradise. It is described everywhere as courageous, ardent, gracious and judicious, as well as sagacious, astute and clement in customs and morals."

The above is from Rifa'a El-Tahtawi's *Faithful Guide to Young Men and Women*, published in the early 1870s, the same decade in which *Al-Ahram* first appeared. El-Tahtawi is generally hailed a pioneer in articulating the concept of Egyptian nationhood and identity. His prolific writings helped to excise the effects of three centuries of Ottoman rule and to pave the way for the emergence of Egyptian national consciousness.

His initiative *did not spring* from the blue. Egypt, by virtue of the wars it had fought against the Sublime Porte in the 1830s, had acquired a unique position within the Ottoman Empire. This status was endorsed by the London agreement of 1840 and enhanced by imperial decrees, notably the *firman* on behalf of Mohamed Ali in 1841 and that on behalf of his grandson the Khedive Ismail in 1873. The considerable autonomy and influence Egypt gained during the century helped kindle the patriotic inspiration of a perceptive vanguard of individuals such as El-Tahtawi.

Over half a century would lapse between El-Tahtawi's pioneering endeavours and the promulgation of the statute of Egyptian nationality in 1929, which formulated a precise definition of Egyptian identity. Nevertheless, the 50 years interval was frought with intellectual and political activity that contributed to il*luminating* and *clarifying* the concept of nationhood and identity.

In particular, it gave rise to pan-nationalism, a movement most closely associated with Ahmed Lutfi El-Sayed (1872-1963), editor of one of the most prominent newspapers of the epoch, *Al-Jarida*. In 1907 he organised *Hizb Al-Umma* (the Party of the Nation) and, through his newspaper, he publicised the party's appeal for complete national independence. His appeal came under attack by the pro-Ottoman press. Obliged to make a partial retraction, he claimed that he actually meant "autonomy", which did not imply total independence from Istanbul. Eventually, as we learn from his memoirs, he regretted this disclaimer. Perhaps the reason he was to abandon all pretence of reverence for the Ottoman regime two years later was the constitutional coup that took place in Turkey in 1908, a coup that was inspired by Turkish nationalists. If this could take place in the very seat of supreme authority, however nominal it had become, then one could only expect others within the empire to follow suit, and Egyptians above all. Lutfi El-Sayed was one of the first to attempt to identify the constituents of the Egyptian nation. He wrote, "It consists of native Egyptians as well as other non-native elements who have adopted Egypt as their permanent place of abode and source of livelihood, *whereby all who reside permanently on* Egyptian territory, regardless of country of origin, shall be considered Egyptians, equal in all rights."

This early, secular stance has astounded scholars. Nevertheless, it was embraced by El-Sayed's disciples who succeeded him at *Al-Jarida* after he resigned as editor. In 1914 they drafted an explicit definition of "Egyptian nationality", according to which people of Turkish, Arabic or Coptic origin were to be treated equally. Discrimination between them, they said, "would be most harmful to Egyptian nationalism," for "if we continue to distinguish between Turk, *fellah*, Arab Egyptian or Coptic Egyptian, we will abet the hand of fate to ruin us."

These two early attempts in 1907 and 1914 to define Egyptian national identity are well known. Little known, however, is their precursor of 1898 for which we turn to *Al-Ahram*.

Before proceeding, we remind the reader of the Syrian origins of the newspaper's owners, Selim and Bishara Taqla. Although they had obtained the status of French subjects and thus had certain political immunity, they never considered this to detract from their patriotism as Egyptians or Ottoman subjects. Rather, they resorted to French consular protection only to defend themselves and their newspaper from "the havoc of despotism," as they said on numerous occasions. Both Selim and Bishara, and Bishara alone after his brother died in 1891, consistently opposed the policies of the British occupation and attacked its supporters, even if they were originally Syrians like themselves. Hence the animosity between them and the owners of *Al-Muqattam*, a pro-British Arabic newspaper.

At the same time, the Taqlas were closely involved with the Syrian community in Egypt, particularly those whose interests had become so intrinsically bound with the welfare of Egypt that they had virtually severed all links with their country of origin. They were thus inspired to seek a formula that would ultimately guarantee them security and stability in their newly adopted homeland. In the last decade of the 19th century, however, certain developments appeared to threaten their sense of security.

In 1890 controversy erupted over the *conditions set* by the Egyptian Examinations Board, which was established to appoint government employees in certain administrative positions. One condition stipulated that applicants had to be of Egyptian birth and parentage and that they could not enjoy foreign immunity. This implicitly excluded people of Syrian origin. *Al-Ahram could* not remain silent. Nor could other newspapers which voiced the concerns of the Syrian community and the Sublime Porte, for whom the measure meant increased Egyptian detachment from the empire.

Al-Ahram voiced its objections vehemently in its 28 April 1890 edition. In a lengthy article it argued that the conditions set by the Examinations Board discriminated against some subjects of the Ottoman Empire. This constituted "treason to the nation and to the Sublime Porte." It concluded, "What we have written here only echoes what is said by every Egyptian who is *sincere in his patriotism* within the Ottoman nation and who cannot be held culpable for such measures."

"Every Ottoman subject should have the same rights as Egyptians and vice versa; they are all part of the whole," *Al-Ahram* continued in its campaign against the stipulations of the Board. Then it laid out conditions for nationality. *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent writes, "Anyone, be they French, Russian, English, Italian, or of other origin, may become an Ottoman citizen after residing in a country within the Ottoman Empire for five full years." As for an Egyptian, he is "an Ottoman subject born in Egypt or an Ottoman subject who has adopted Egypt as his homeland for a period exceeding five years, on the condition that he is not subject to any form of foreign immunity." Finally, almost by way of warning, the article said that citizens' political and legal rights within the empire are one.

Throughout the 1890s the debate would continue to flare up periodically and become the subject of a newspaper editorial. In fact, just over a year later, on 28 May 1892, under the headline "National Service", *Al-Ahram* once again underscored the intimate relationship between Egyptian and Ottoman identity. The sense of Egyptian-Ottoman patriotism is a sacred right and an honourable duty, the author writes. This sense, amplified by the knowledge of the British reverence for national rights, is the secret behind the Egyptian-Ottoman demand for the end to the occupation, so that he too can claim his share in these rights. Moreover, the writer argues, the Egyptian question is one of grave concern to all Ottoman subjects. "The khedive's rule over Egypt is *indivisible* from the body of the Ottoman Sultanate and Egyptians, by virtue of their unyielding faith, are strongly bound and dedicated to the Sublime Porte."

A second occasion would soon add fire to *Al-Ahram*'s campaign. It involved the Egyptian courts and we first learn of it in *Al-Ahram*'s 21 March 1898 edition, which reports, "Two young well-educated lawyers petitioned the Governorate of Cairo to be included among the nominees for representative office, although they were of Syrian origin. Having received no response from the governorate, the two young gentlemen appealed to the Appellate Court and engaged the learned counsel of the illustrious lawyer Niqola Effendi Toma."

Al-Ahram rallied to the young men's defence. According to the newspaper, there were two categories of Syrians (Ottoman subjects) residing in Egypt. The first are those who have refused to take on Egyptian nationality and who are therefore not subject to military service and accordingly they should be considered transient nationals like other foreigners. As for the second category, they are those who have been accepted to serve in the military or to pay the compensatory fee and they were born in, or spent a minimum of 15 years in Egypt. They should most certainly be entitled to nomination."

Over the following four months until the court announced its verdict on 9 June, the Arabic and foreign language press in Egypt engaged in the debate over what constituted Egyptian nationality and eligibility for nomination.

The most important court session in this case was held on 2 June, with Toma defending the two young lawyers and Abdallah Samika as the attorney for the prosecution. Toma opened his plea with an attempt to define Egypt's status within the Ottoman Empire. The Sublime Porte decrees promulgated on behalf of Mohamed Ali and Ismail granted the country certain privileges, but, "the people of Egypt remain Ottoman subjects in political terms." The parliamentary councils to which the young lawyers wished to be nominated consisted of Egyptians "who are composed of diverse elements united by territory".

The lawyer's plea received *Al-Ahram*'s resounding approval. "His speech had a grand effect," *it commented. Its coverage* of the prosecution's rebuttal was restricted to the points concerning the nature of Egyptian nationality. To Abdallah Samika the Egyptian nation was "a collection of Muslims, Copts and Levantines who had settled in Egypt before or during the reign of Mohamed Ali." He submitted proof to the effect that the plaintiffs had not been subject to military conscription and then proceeded to argue, "As for the fact that they pay taxes and are subject to the laws of this government and to the authority of the khedive, this is obligatory as they are not subjects of a foreign country to which the Sublime Porte has *granted* concessions." He concluded, "Every Egyptian is an Ottoman subject, but the reverse is not necessarily the case.

The argument did not please *Al-Ahram*. It based its riposte on nationalist grounds, arguing that the prosecution was pressured by the occupation authorities. "It is in British interests to consider Egypt as independent of the supreme government in practice, if not in name and by virtue of international law and similarly it is in their interests to see strife between Egyptians and Syrians."

The court verdict itself took up less than three *lines* of print in *Al-Ahram*: "The court has determined its jurisdiction to review the case and has rejected the appeal of the two claimants." Yet the substantiation took up two pages of the 16 July 1898 edition in which it appeared.

The ruling was divided into two sections, the first dealing with "Egyptian nationality" and the second with "Who is an Egyptian?". It represents the first attempt on the part of the courts in modern Egyptian history to contend with this sensitive issue. Nationality in political and civil terms, according to judge Mohamed Afifi "is defined by the bond between the members of a society and its government, whereby scholars of law have determined that every society that has an independent government is a nation, the members of which share the same nationality... The Egyptian nation enjoys an individual political and civilian national character and the individuals who belong to that society enjoy the nationality of this society. An Egyptian is only an Ottoman subject by virtue of the allegiance he owes to the sovereign state, not by virtue of common nationality."

As for the Egyptian national himself, according to the ruling, this comprises, "every individual who resided in Egypt when it was granted the aforementioned rights and privileges, without regard to religious or ethnic affiliation, whether they be native inhabitants or have immigrated to Egypt during the reign of Mohamed Ali, since prior to the rights and privileges granted to him, Egypt did not have a nationality independent of that of the Ottoman Empire."

Finally, he stated that, as regards the acquisition of another nationality, "the fact that a person has resided in a country other than his native country, for however long a period, does not automatically bestow upon that person the nationality of that county in which he has chosen to reside as long as he does not apply for it or as long as the government does not confer it upon him."

Although *Al-Ahram* was naturally upset by the court's decision, its final comment was nevertheless level-headed. "In spite of its weaknesses, it should not arouse rancor or animosity," it *said*, "for the objective of the case was to bring Egyptians and Syrians together as a single nation. The Syrians are too sensible to open between themselves and their brother Egyptians a door through which the foreigner can penetrate." With this comment, *Al-Ahram* closed this little-known file on the question of Egyptian nationality.

The author is a renowned historian and a professor of modern history at Ain Shams University.

Mohandes Insurance to review capital

SAMIR Mustafa Metwalli, chairman of the board of Mohandes Insurance Co, explained that because the demand of some of its major shareholders, the company's general assembly meeting will include in its agenda a proposal to increase the issued capital of the company by LE2mn.

Metwalli said that the proposed increase will raise the company's capital from its current level of LE20mn to LE22mn. A free share will be given for every ten a shareholder owns. This is in addition to raising the profit margin distributed for the fiscal year 1994-95 to 30 per cent of the share's nominal value as well as the difference between the nominal value of the free share and its market value.



Munich exhibitions seminar

IBRAHIM Fawzi, minister of industry, attended a seminar organised by the German Arab Chamber of Commerce in Cairo, dealing with forthcoming Munich exhibitions and how Egyptian and Arab industries can benefit from participating in them. Also attending the seminar was the head of the Egyptian Exhibitions Organisation, in addition to officials from business sector ministries, and heads of major companies.

During the seminar, an official from the Munich exhibitions organisation discussed future exhibitions which will be held, and how easy it is for Egyptian companies to participate in them. Egyptian companies are considered among the major companies which participate in these fairs.

[redacted]

IN LINE with its ambitious philosophy oriented towards universal banking, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has broken through many of the investment banking specialties in addition to introducing non-traditional services required by the Egyptian market.

Mr. Sayed Kamar, NBE board member, highlighted the fact that the bank has innovated the real estate market to be the intermediary, organising offers and providing expertise and consultancy in real estate contracts. The market has an information network pertinent to the most important housing projects in Egypt and is considered a real market where real estate assets are negotiated (according *to the regulations set by the market management*). The desires of the vendor and buyer are matched together in an environment pregnant with confidence and guided by supply and demand forces, which facilitates the conclusion of contracts at a just price.

Through the market, important indications of the housing prices in Egypt can be prepared. Sale audiences will be held on the first Friday of the month, and the market will receive the vendors during the first 10 days of the month. The competent bodies of the market then give a thorough inspection of the real estate as well as the documents, determine the units to be negotiated in the sale audiences and prepare the tender documents. The market thereafter receives the buyers during the last 10 days of each month.

The market provides its customers with a number *of advantages, mainly saving the vendor all* the marketing burdens, protecting both the vendor and the buyer from the brokers' exploitation, and slashing selling costs borne by the vendor and the buyer.

Furthermore, the market seeks the assistance of engineering consultancy offices to prepare technical reports on the real estates, legal advisors to scrutinise the documents and specialised estimators to run the sale and purchase audiences. All housing units (whatever their areas), factories of different activities, agricultural land, summer or winter resorts and different areas of land in abeyance can be negotiated in the market, NBE has established a branch inside the stock exchange premises to streamline work and provide customers with the finance deemed necessary for the operations.

Selling your real estate is no longer a problem as *the first real estate market is organised and run by* NBE to serve the vendor and protect the buyer. It is a real exchange market where real estates are negotiated exactly as commodities and securities.

New companies established

THE COMPANIES' committee at the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade, headed by Ahmed Fuad Atta, approved the establishment of 24 companies, of which 16 are joint-stock companies whose total authorised capital amounts to LE71mn, and have an issued capital of LE22,750mn.

Eight of those companies are of limited liability whose total capital amount is LE1,450mn. Sixteen companies are headquartered in Cairo, 4 companies in Giza, 3 in Alexandria, and one in Hurghada.

It is worth noting that the majority of these newly-established companies are based in Cairo. These companies are:

— Iban Real Estate Services
— Coproduction
— American Marketing Co.
— El-Harth Engineering for Real Estate Investment Co.
— El-Roda Import and Export Co.
— Pepsi Cola
— United Engineering Group for Real Estate Investment
— Environs Egypt for Gardening
— Engineering Co. for Trade and Industry
— Arab Builders Co.
— Gold Joy Holiday Egypt
— Red Sea Express for Trade
— El-Safa for Trade and Contracting Works
— International Egyptian Service
— Abu Simbel International for Trade and Agencies
— El-Wataniya for Real Estate Investment
— El-Faraoniya for Housing
— CG for Trading and Distribution
— Nassar Contracting Co.
— Arab World Import and Export Co.

Increase in tourist statistics

A RECENT report issued by the Agency for General Mobilisation and Statistics says that the number of tourists to Egypt in September and October 1995 has increased by 16 per cent, in comparison with the number of tourists who came during the same period last year. The number of tourists during these two months reached 661 thousand as opposed to 559 thousand during September-October 1994.

The report also shows that the average number of tourist nights was 10.6 nights during September-October 1995, in comparison to 9.2 nights during the same period in the previous year. The total number of tourist nights for these two months reached 6500 nights, up from 5790 nights during September-October 1994.

The report also indicates that the total volume of non-petroleum products transported by sea during September 1995 reached 3201 thousand tonnes, as opposed to 2215 thousand tonnes in September 1994. Likewise, the number of non-petroleum goods transported by air during the same month in the current year reached 658 thousand tonnes, in contrast to the 611 thousand tonnes reached during the same month last year.

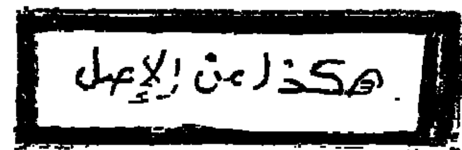
There was, however, a drop in the number of boats crossing the Suez Canal in September 1995 which reached 1153, with 174 petroleum tankers, and 979 non-petroleum cargo ships, carrying 28 million tonnes and bringing the canal US$148mn in revenues, as opposed to 1342 ships in September 1994 carrying 30 million tonnes which brought the canal US$156mn.

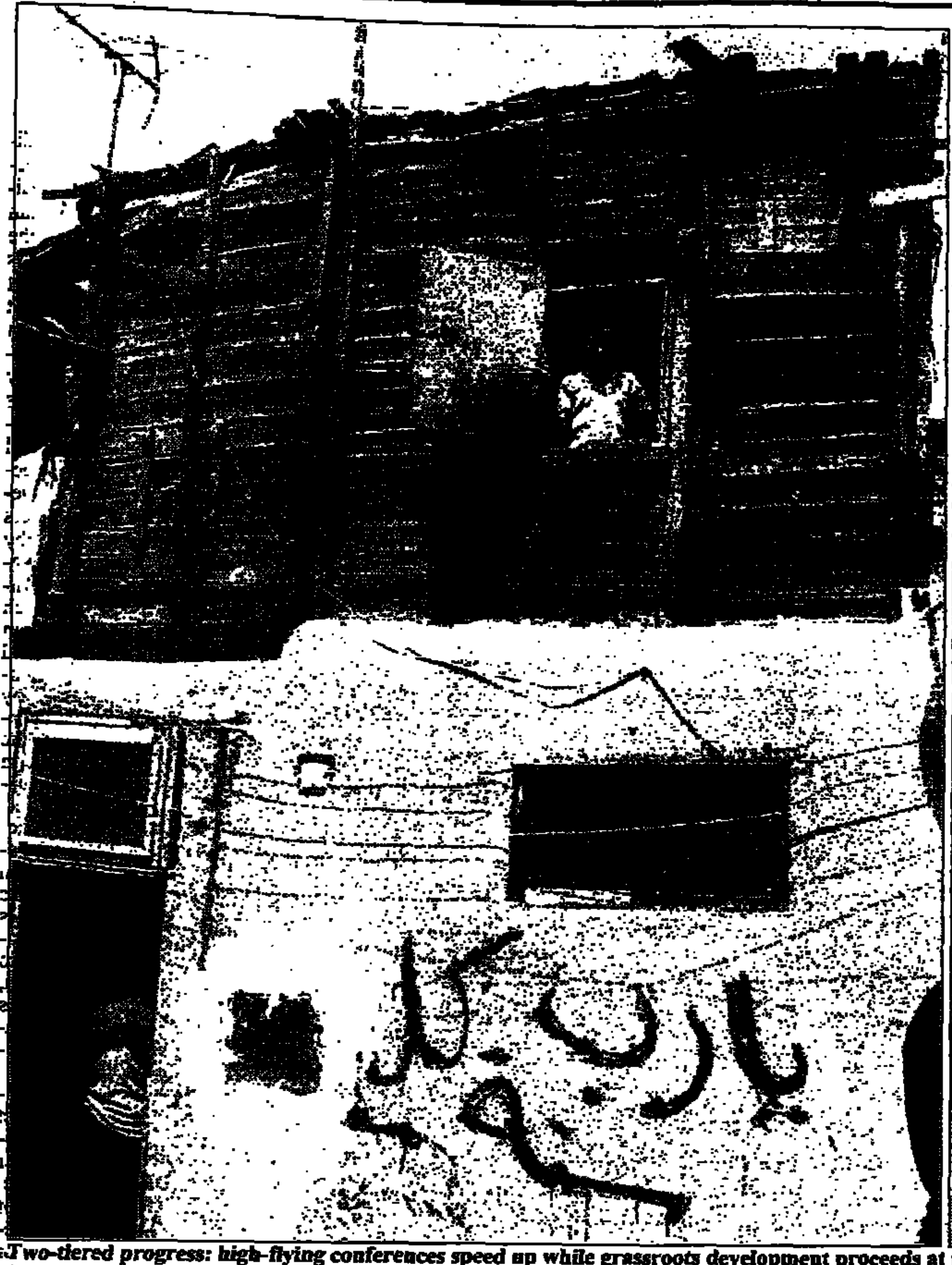
Egyptian companies in German exhibition

A NUMBER of Egyptian companies specialised in textiles will participate in the Hemitextil exhibition, and will set up their displays within the German Arab Chamber of Commerce in Cairo's pavilion. The exhibition, which will take place from 10-13 January in Frankfurt Germany, is considered one of the most important exhibitions specialising in furniture. Over 2660 companies from over 76 countries from around the world will attend and participate in the exhibition. It is expected that over 94 thousand visitors will attend.

During 1994-95 exhibition, Egyptian products were met with great demand and Egyptian companies were successful in establishing *working relationships with major* companies of the world.

The executive director of the German Arab Chamber of Commerce in Cairo said that the chamber believes in the importance of the role which Egyptian companies play by participating in this exhibition, which will open new markets for Egyptian products not only in Germany but in Europe and the whole world.






Two-tiered progress: high-flying conferences speed up while grassroots development proceeds at tortoise pace

photos: Al-Ahram

Waiting for the difference

A flurry of national, regional and international gatherings convened this year — the offspring of the Beijing conference — in order to address topics of global concern. Environment, education, health and shelter for the poor are included on the agenda for the promotion and implementation of sustainable development. In practice, however, what if anything has "trickled down"? One woman told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that for her, nothing has changed

Aziza works as a maid. She is 42 and has eight children, the youngest three-and-a-half years old, the eldest 18. She is illiterate and lives in a rented flat in an informal settlement. Her husband has a mental condition and has been out of work for the past 16 years. Until this year, when her older daughter went to work as a maid, Aziza was the sole breadwinner of the family. Aziza was born in a village of Sharqiya. She was married off at 16, just after her father died, to a relative who was a construction worker in Cairo.

AZIZA earns LE400 a month. Her daughter gives her LE100. She puts LE250 in several *gamiyyas* (rotating funds in which each member in turn receives the total amount of money collected).

She was once given a LE1,000 bonus by an employer who was leaving the country; another time she received LE3,000 as payment by the owner for vacating a rented flat. Over the years, while her husband was still working, she bought a little gold that she kept for a rainy day.

SHE says her husband injured his back while carrying loads too heavy for him. He started taking painkillers. He also drank heavily. Under the influence of a combination of drugs and alcohol, he became violent. Unable to cope, she took him to a private hospital, where he was treated then discharged. When he relapsed she took him back. "As long as I could pay for the hospital it was not so bad," says Aziza. "But his condition kept recurring and becoming worse. At home he refused to take the medicine. I was at work all day and could not make sure that he took his pills. At the hospital they gave him injections. They worked for a while. He used to sleep all day. But, then, he got used to them and stopped sleeping. I used to come home to find that he had gone on a rampage, beating up the children, breaking all the furniture and picking fights with the neighbours." She took him back to the hospital, where he stayed several months. Aziza had to pay LE300 a month. "When I had no money left, I told the doctor. He warned me that if I took him out he would relapse but they could not lower the fees so I had to take him home," she says.

She takes her husband to the hospital as an outpatient every month. Her biggest problem is getting him there and back. "I cannot use public transport. I have to go with two men who restrain him and when taxi drivers see the state he is in, they either refuse to take us or ask for outrageous fares. On some occasions I have paid LE25 just to take him to the hospital."

Her only alternative is to put him into a state hospital. "But I heard horror stories and people say that I will never be able to visit him there. They will just call me when he dies. How can I do this to him?"

FROM the time she came to Cairo with her husband, Aziza has lived in informal settlements. At the present time she lives in Bassatin in a four storey building that was severely damaged by the 1992 earthquake. She has been warned that she has to vacate the flat several times already. "The owner took pity on me and gave me another year, but he wants to rebuild, he has the permit, and soon, pity or no pity, my time will be up." She has bought a piece of land in another informal settlement, Torbet Al-Yahud (the Jewish cemetery), for LE400 from a squatter on government land, and has had four walls built but has no money for the roof. Ultimately she wants two rooms and a toilet but she does not know how she is going to get enough money for the project. "They say that the government is going to give the inhabitants a chance to buy their plot in easy instalments. I wish I could do that because eventually those who are not going to buy will be evicted." As a married woman, however, Aziza is not considered the head of her family before the law, and therefore cannot apply to pay in instalments.

AZIZA has never had an identity card because she has no birth certificate, and because she never thought that she would come to need one. During one of his attacks, her husband burned his identity card together with several of his children's birth certificates. Aziza does not seem to be able to get her husband a new ID card and without that document she finds that a number of avenues are closed to her. For instance, without it she cannot obtain copies of her children's birth certificates nor can she enroll them in intermediate education. "Now they not only want the child's birth certificate, they also ask for the father's ID card. I went dozens of times to the police station to explain that my husband lost his card. They ask me for the number. I tell them the one I remember. They tell me it is an old number and I should find the new number. I don't know where to look and of course my husband cannot tell me. Now Karim, my youngest son, cannot go to kindergarten because I cannot produce his father's ID. I worry because if my husband dies I will not be able to bury him without the proper documents. Maybe if I had the time I could find a way to trace all these papers, but how long could I stay out of work?"

AZIZA'S oldest daughter finished primary school before her father's illness. According to Aziza she was doing well and could have continued her schooling; but when Aziza's husband became violent he repeatedly tore up her daughter's books, to the point where the child imagined that she was bringing about his crises and began to hate school. She soon dropped out.

Aziza now has one son in primary school. He had problems at the beginning of the year because Aziza did not have the LE30 required for the books. "The government said that the children would be issued the books on the first day of school and I saw the books in the school's stores, but the headmaster decided that only those who brought the money could have them. I borrowed the amount but now the teacher says that the first few days that my son missed are holding him back. I have enrolled him in a study group at school. It costs LE6 a lesson. The other children never completed the primary stage." Aziza has enough worries, she says, and cannot attend to them. Enrolling a child in school takes time: a precious commodity.

One bright spot in her life is her 13-year-old daughter, Hanan. She has never been to school but last year she enrolled in a literacy class and now she can read. "These classes are wonderful," says Aziza. "They're completely free and they teach you so quickly. Hanan is thinking of continuing in this programme and often, when her father is asleep, she sits with me and teaches me the letters. She says I could learn."

Aziza's greatest wish is to learn how to read and write, to "learn" generally. Many of her problems, she says, stem from the fact that she does not know enough.

"WHEN my husband came out of hospital they told me the medication he was on had made him sterile. My three youngest children were conceived while he was on this medication. I went to the family planning centre but they told me I was too fat to be fitted with an IUD. The pill made me sick and the doctor said that I could have heart trouble if I kept taking it. He told me that I should stay away from my husband. If I refuse him, my husband beats me then turns against the children. So now as soon as I get home I give him two injections to make him sleep."

Aziza does not blame anyone for her troubles. Strangely enough, she is not bitter. She thinks that people should help themselves to get what they want, clean their surroundings — she and the women of her street sweep the road in front of each house every morning and have arranged for the garbage to be taken away every day. They pay LE4 per household for garbage collection: the price is higher than the rate for suburban Maadi, but she thinks that cleanliness has a price "which we pay gladly. We do not want the diseases that accumulated rubbish can bring."

For someone who has so little "free" time she is surprisingly well informed and is familiar with many development projects. She understands their aim, and approves wholeheartedly. "People should not wait for the government to do everything. They should learn to look after themselves. By working hard we can improve our condition." Of course, outside help is more than welcome and she would be ready to enter any programme which promises a better life for her and her children. If she has a bone to pick, it is with the bureaucracy, or rather the bureaucrats. "The system is the system," she says, "but you can use it to help the people or you can use it to make people's life miserable."



A white Christmas

As far back as I can remember, my family celebrated Christmas. There were no religious undertones to the event: it was just a time for the family, for being together, a feast, for the children lovingly engineered by the grown-ups. My father took time to decorate the Christmas tree, fiddling with the lights which every year seemed to develop a will of their own, contrary to his. The tree was never a very elaborate affair, just a branch of pine balanced with sand in a wooden pail and some colourful baubles, a few Santas and maybe a reindeer or two. Some of our relatives had really grand trees reaching to the ceiling, hung with collectors' teddy bears and imported decorations which we went to admire on Christmas day, but I liked our tree best. It belonged to what I thought of as our family tradition. It held memories of past Christmases and reassured me as to the permanence of things, of more Christmases to come, impregnated with the taste of hot chocolate and the smell of new books. I used to become inordinately upset if our Christmas "schedule" was changed in any way.

I also liked to believe in Santa Claus and kept doing so even after spying one of my letters to Santa on my mother's dresser long past Christmas.

There was, however, a serious flaw to the festivities, one which I could never bring myself fully to accept: the lack of snow. It troubled me and somehow spoiled my mood as I came to believe that ours was a second-class Christmas. Santa, I reflected, could have no great consideration for snow-less children who, what is more, did not even provide a chimney for his convenience. I always made sure to include a paragraph in my letters explaining the situation. This feeling of uneasiness kept growing until, as an adolescent, I decided that it was improper for us to celebrate a feast with trappings borrowed from another culture.

With children of my own I had to make a decision: in snow-less Sydney, should I tell them about the "real" Christmas, the white one? Should Santa Claus be introduced with his furs and reindeer? And how about chimneys? In a country where Christmas is a summer celebration it seemed ludicrous. But what can one replace Christmas with? Unable to conjure up a white mantel with which to cover the Australian greenery, I simply followed the example of other mothers who, oblivious to the heat, stuffed felt stockings with the usual fare, wrapped presents, baked Christmas cakes, puddings and mince pies, and planned for turkeys which would be packed for picnics on the beach.

This time, however, we were not only short of snow and chimneys: the traditional tree had gone. With talk about the depletion of forests and protection of the environment only the very selfish would sneak out under the cover of night to saw down a young pine and take it home, claiming afterwards that they could not possibly give up the tradition. Along with other, more enlightened members of the community, I experimented with different genres. "It is all in the spirit," I kept telling myself. "It is the togetherness that counts." I vividly remember a hideous environment-friendly object, made out of a dead tree painted gold — with matching gold-dipped ornaments — raising its skeletal branches to the ceiling, probably in indignation. Another piece of handy-work sported home-made silk flowers that looked every bit like a misshaped red cauliflower. I don't know if these monstrosities contributed to the preservation of the ecological balance but they certainly went a long way towards spoiling the Christmas spirit for me. It felt weird to place the carefully wrapped presents under these contraptions which invariably smelled strongly of chemicals. Deprived of snow, chimneys and pine needles, I was convinced that my daughters would grow up somehow psychologically impaired. I often excused their shortcomings as stemming from the lack of a proper Christmas in their childhood. And how would they be able to pass the Christmas spirit on to their children? Would they give up celebrating?

But I should have known better: the other day my granddaughter, who lives in the States, expressed her disappointment at my not sharing Christmas with them. To tempt me, she described the house decorations and the lovely Christmas (pine) tree that her father had just finished putting up. I reassured her that we too would be celebrating here. "But how can you have Christmas if you don't have snow? she asked, bewildered. "My mother says that Santa needs snow to slide down the chimney." My point exactly.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Chicken with chestnuts

A delicious dish for the festive season:

Ingredients:

2 chicken
1/2 kilo fresh chestnuts
Chicken stock
2 cups milk
2 tbsp. flour
1 bunch parsley, finely chopped
Butter
Salt, pepper

Method:

Cook chicken boiled the usual way and remove from stock.

Cut each chicken in four parts, skin and remove bones then set aside.

Boil the chestnuts whole throwing them in boiling water, remove *outer* skin and set aside.

Make a white sauce of light consistency with flour, milk, chicken stock and butter. Season and pour over chicken quarters reserving some of the sauce to heat chestnuts in. Then add the parsley and pour over chicken, distributing chestnuts around the dish. Serve piping hot with white rice and green salad.

Happy new year!

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

The crux of the matter

Nigel Ryan discovers an antidote to festivity

At the end of Alfi Street, just before Midan Tawfeqiya, the pavements are littered with white and red paper bags. They are everywhere, and they all sport a jolly little man with a chef's hat and striped trousers, arms outspread. Between the arms the words "Excellent fresh foods, the finest first class restaurant". Akher Sa'a is something of an institution. The restaurant is always full, the takeaway section packed to overflowing. Akher Sa'a, one must assume, is doing something right.

What better place — after seasonal excess — in which to lunch than an institution that promises "Excellent fresh foods" (again on its paper bags). So off I went, following the crowds.

Only one table free, and that at the back of the restaurant. The tables are packed in like sardines, and can prove a little difficult to negotiate. But nobody objects to moving over to allow you to pass, which is all to the good, given the circumstances.

The claims on the paper bags are perhaps a little anomalous, since Akher Sa'a is a down to earth *fuul* and *tamiya* shop. The finest first class restaurant may well be overstating the case, though as *fuul* and *tamiya* shops go Akher Sa'a is a smartish operation, if not quite at the deluxe end of the market.

If you do not have to wait for a table then the service is pretty nifty. Lentil soup, omelette with *basturma*, *tamiya*, *fuul*, salads and fried potatoes were brought within minutes. A basket of bread was already on the table, left over from the previous occupant.

Be warned, this is hearty fare. There is nothing wishy washy about presentation, nothing fey about the food. Things that are deep fried are deep fried. Soup is thick. Eggs are cooked in *ghee*. The *fuul* lies beneath a layer of oil. It would be foolish to count cholesterol, preposterous to expect a radish rose.

The lentil soup contained noodles and fried onions. Everybody in the restaurant appeared to have bowls, the reason being that it is the nicest thing on the menu. The *tamiya* was greasy, coated in a few coriander seeds, and looked peculiarly unappetizing on the stainless steel plate — the result of oozing oil in quantity. My companion pronounced the *fuul* passable, and he has eaten a lot of *fuul* in his time. An omelette, with *basturma*, would be pretty difficult to foul up, though I must confess that I prefer the rind of the *basturma* removed. The fried potatoes were stone cold and far from pleasant.

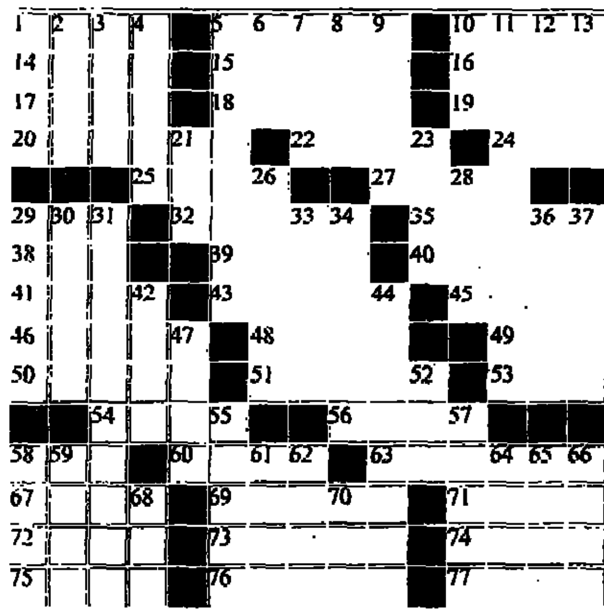
So what is it that Akher Sa'a does so well? Even with such a mass turnover the food could be much better. It need not cost more: a little extra care might improve things tremendously. But there comes a point when you can't knock things if they work, and Akher Sa'a obviously works for a large number of people. It is, though, the only outlet of its type in the area — a restaurant in which you can sit, fairly comfortably, and eat, fairly quickly, and get — and here we reach the crux of the matter — a bill for LE7, to be shared between two.

Akher Sa'a Restaurant, 8 Al-Alfi St. Tel 575 1668 & 575 3521. Also at 11 Abdel-Khaleq Tharwat St. Tel 574 5763 & 574 5864.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



ACROSS

1. Cut short (4)
5. Most Middle Easterners (5)
10. Conjunction of comparison (4)
14. Limping (4)
15. Nascent (5)
16. Aspiration (4)
17. Landed (4)
18. Plural of that (5)
19. Highland Gaelic (4)
20. Pique, irritate (6)
22. Convene (4)
24. Crimson (3)
25. Shrill cry of dog in pain (4)
27. Ulcerated chilblain (4)
29. Marry (3)
32. Greek architecture; broad rustic dialect (5)
35. A music composition (5)
38. Spanish cheer (3)
39. Yearn for (4)
40. Terminated (5)
41. Manner (4)
43. Coarse corundum for polishing (5)
45. Finished (4)
46. Supple, well coordinated (5)
48. A crystalline compound (4)
49. United Service Organisation, abb. (3)
50. Cols; part of bottle near mouth, pl. (4)
51. Situation; pronounce (5)
53. Japanese monetary unit (3)
54. Cleopatra's murderer, pl. (4)
56. Asian country (4)
58. Posed (3)
60. 3' (4)
63. Munched (6)
67. Greedy (4)
69. Chuckle (5)
71. Volume (4)
72. Person hired by racketeers to terrorise workers (4)
73. Clyster (5)
74. Similar (4)
75. Former coin of India (4)
76. Climber's peg support (5)
77. Snares (4)

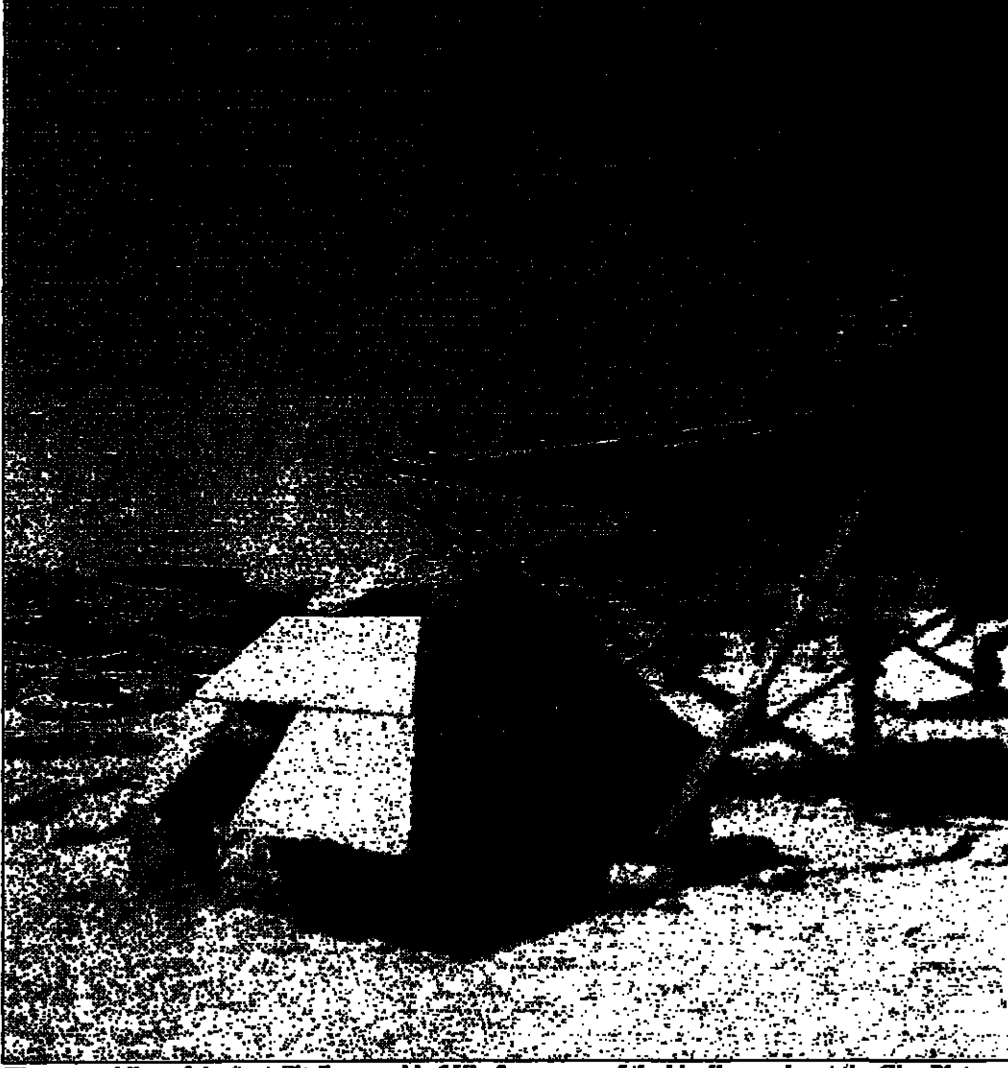
DOWN

1. Sept; clique (4)
2. Rattling sound in lungs (4)
3. Overlook (4)
4. Paltry (5)
5. Chamois or gnu (8)
6. Cheer of encouragement (3)
7. Smallest particle of a chemical element (4)
8. Foundation (4)
9. Suave; make lustrous (5)
10. Definite article (3)
11. Dreadful (10)
12. Recess at end of church (4)
13. Requirement (4)
21. Guided (3)
23. Exhaust (4)
26. Presiding bishop of Episcopalian Church (6)
28. Tie (4)
29. Lady (5)
30. Discourse in honour of deceased person (5)
31. Devotion (10)
33. Lifeless (5)
34. Of corn or edible grain (6)
36. Closely packed (5)
37. Ancient Grecian music hall (5)
42. Mooses (4)
44. Scimitar with double-curved blade and handle (8)
47. Notice, observe (4)
52. Immeasurable period of time (3)
55. Nutritive meal from dried orchid root (45)
57. Beelzebub (5)
58. Legend (4)
59. English river (4)
61. Hindu queen (4)
62. Musical composition for two voices (40)
64. Arose (4)
65. Send forth (4)
66. Cozy places (45)
68. Genetic code (3)
70. Mog, jumbled (3)

T	H	O	R		S	P	A	S		C	A	B	A	L
R	A	V	E		T	A	S	K		A	N	I	L	E
A	L	E		H	A	P	P	Y		N	Y	L	O	N
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D	A	F	F	Y		R	E	A	R		N	E	N	E

Last week's solution


The discovery of the burial place of 52 of Ramses II's sons topped 1995 archaeological events


The pyramidion of the "satellite" pyramid of Khufu was one of the big discoveries at the Giza Plateau

Year of discovery

Vestiges of the famous Alexandria lighthouse, a mausoleum for the sons of Ramses II, and a 4,000-year old pyramid are but a few of the remarkable discoveries made in 1995, writes **Jill Kamil**

This was the year when archaeology became front-page news, a year when discoveries made headlines in the international media and, in some cases, raised controversial issues.

Back in February, news spread of the alleged discovery of the tomb of Alexander the Great in Siwa Oasis. A month later, in March, vestiges of the famous lighthouse, regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, were brought up off the shore of Qait Bey Fort in Alexandria. Then in May came the discovery of the largest tomb ever found in Egypt, the burial place of 52 of Ramses II's sons.

In the light of such extraordinary finds, the discovery of the 4000-year old pyramid of a little known queen at Saqqara (thus bringing the number of known pyramids in Egypt to 97), the unearthing of a pyramidion or cap-stone of the 'satellite' pyramid of Khufu at Giza, and the discovery of a new nobleman's tomb at Abu Sir, paled in comparison.

In terms of controversy caused and newsprint generated, the biggest discovery this year, not just in Egypt but in the world of archaeology as a whole, was undoubtably that of a tomb, said by Liana Sovaltzi, the Greek archaeologist in charge of the project, to be that of none other than Alexander the Great. Within 24 hours of the news leaking to the press, archaeologists around the world questioned her claim and the world press buzzed with speculation. Some said that what she had identified was an already-known temple, and not a tomb at all; others maintained that even if it was a tomb, there was no substantial evidence that it belonged to the Macedonian leader; in fact, it was pointed out, there is strong literary evidence that Alexander was buried in Alexandria.

Could he have been buried at the great Mediterranean port and then, as Sovaltzi maintains, re-buried at Siwa? Before the week was out, Abdel-Halim Noureddin, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), accompanied by a delegation of Greek archaeologists from Athens, inspected the site in the Maraqi area of Siwa, some 25km from the town. The Greek team expressed scepticism at the lack of evidence and departed. Noureddin paid a second visit to the area, confirmed that the site was "the tomb of a great man" whom he did not name, and granted Sovaltzi permission to continue her excavations. For the outcome in 1996, watch this space.

The discovery by a Franco-Egyptian team of underwater archaeologists working offshore of Qait Bey Fort in the Mediterranean, of evidence of what they claimed was the famous lighthouse, destroyed by an earthquake, was also the subject of speculation. While divers studied the underwater remains and took photographs of literally thousands of blocks of stone and objects littering the sea bed, questions were raised about the significance of the find, and what should be done about it. For example, were the blocks of stone and objects actually a part of the original lighthouse, or had they been pillaged from other monuments and re-used on the Qait Bey site? How much should be salvaged? Where should the remnants be stored?

Noureddin authorised the teams to proceed with excavations, and in October, visitors to the site were rewarded with the spectacle of a huge granite torso of a woman being hauled from the Mediterranean. The awed hush of the crowd assembled at Alexandria's Eastern Harbour was broken only by the feverish whirring of the world's television cameras.

One after the other, huge relics were raised and brought to shore by a floating crane. Some 30 objects are now in the Maritime Museum for restoration and display. Needless to say, excavations will continue throughout the coming year.

This has been a good year for underwater archaeology. Divers also discovered a 17th century vessel offshore at Qusseir in the Red Sea, and while there are conflicting opinions on the age of the ship, and when and how it came to grief, divers report a fascinating cargo including glass objects, copper utensils and porcelain artefacts.

"Ancient tomb yields new secrets" was *Al-Ahram Weekly*'s headline last May for the story that Egyptologist Kent Weeks' excavation in the Valley of the Kings had resulted in the discovery of the largest tomb ever found in Egypt. KV5, as the tomb is known, had already been identified by early explorers, but no one had progressed beyond the entrance corridor, and the tomb was later obscured by flood-borne debris and wind-blown sand.

Throughout 1993 and 1994 Weeks and his team cleared part of the tomb and revealed a huge 16-pillared hall. Then, this year, tunnelling through a corridor to the rear of the hall — filled almost to the ceiling with accumulated rubble — they discovered that the hall was flanked by 20 chambers, and led to a huge statue of the god Osiris. Further clearance revealed two transverse corridors, each flanked by 20 more chambers. Fragmentary objects have been identified with several of Ramses II's 52 sons, and it seems certain that KV5 is a mausoleum built for their burial.

No pharaoh built on a more monumental scale than Ramses II during his 67-year rule, so it was really no surprise that the largest multiple tomb ever discovered should be his handiwork. As news of the discovery spread around the world, tourists in the Valley of the Kings were keen to take a look, and Noureddin kept a close eye on progress. President Hosni Mubarak even broke into his busy schedule and paid a visit to the tomb en-route to Cairo after political meetings in Aswan.

But more surprises were in store. Excavations continued and Weeks announced in November that the number of chambers discovered had risen from 67 to nearly 100. Other corridors, also flanked by side chambers, had been discovered extending from the front of the 16-pillared hall. This has led to speculation about the significance of this tomb: the largest yet discovered, it is also the most irregular in shape. And because there are more chambers than sons, questions are being raised as to whether his daughters are buried here too. And, amidst the speculation, one thing is clear: the Valley of the Kings still has secrets left to yield.

1995 was also a year when authorities had to deal with the conflict between life in the late twentieth century and the need to preserve Egypt's heritage. Back in January, the Giza Plateau attracted international attention when it was realised that the course of the ring road being built to divert traffic from Cairo was on a collision course with the plateau, and that, if allowed to continue, it would cut through protected archaeological areas and bring traffic, with its resulting vibrations, dangerously close to the Pyramids and the Sphinx. The SCA rushed to the area and carried out a survey which resulted in confirmation of what was already known — that the site is rich in archaeological remains and should be protected. While plans went ahead to re-route the ring road, excavations continued. Among the most unusual discoveries were Ptolemaic sarcophagi complete with mummies, and unique wooden ithyphallic statues of the deceased in Osiris' form.

Meanwhile, as new finds come to light, Egypt continues to restore and maintain the already-discovered links with her past. By January, the adverse affects of the floods of October-November 1994 (described as the worst in 75 years) had been remedied. Wide cement-lined ditches protected temples like that of Hatshepsut and Seti I from further damage, and flood debris was removed. And the SCA sprang to action to fit a new steel-beam roof to protect the famous tomb of Tutankhamun.

At Giza, the long-awaited project to revamp the pyramid plateau finally got the go-ahead from Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, and July saw the beginning of the demolition of buildings encroaching on the plateau, including King Farouk's resthouse.

High on the list of priorities at Giza is the removal of the makeshift ticket office which currently serves visitors to the *Son et Lumiere* at the Sphinx. And the Sphinx itself, undergoing the last stages of a six-year restoration, will be the focus of an international conference to be held next year to coincide with the remodelling of Abul-Hol Square in Nazlet Al-Siman. The date has yet to be announced.

With archaeologists diving, tunnelling and clearing, restorers conserving and protecting, and opportunities being given to innovative and industrious people anxious to learn more about Egypt's long and rich heritage, we launch into a new year hoping for more of the same.

Quiz round-up

OUR QUIZ, covering places in Egypt and Egyptian history, has been running for a full year now. Over the past week, staff at the *Weekly*'s travel page have been sifting through the past twelve months' entries to see just who responded to our competition, and to learn something about our readership.

Perhaps the most striking thing we've noticed is the wide area of the country our readers come from. In addition to entries from Cairo and Alexandria, we've had responses from Dakahlia, Aswan, Assiut, Sohag, Damietta, Menoufiya, Sharqiya and Luxor, and from both Egyptians and foreign residents. In fact most of the entries came from Middle and Upper Egypt — and most of the winners were Upper Egyptians. In Al-Mahalla Al-Kobra, one whole family joined together with their friends to respond regularly. Their efforts paid off. They've won three prizes — so far. There were even some responses from outside Egypt, including one from Monika Stiebert in Germany, who would, it seems, have been prepared to travel all the way to Egypt to enjoy a Ramadan *iftar*.

We've been able to offer some very attractive prizes over the past year, including trips to Luxor, South Sinai, Hurghada and Port Said. One lucky entrant won a Nile cruise between Luxor and Aswan; others have been treated to lunch in five-star hotels and free passes to the ancient sites. The biggest prize was a trip organised by the Egyptian Tourist Authority, where 15 winners escaped a sweltering Cairo summer to relax for three days in a holiday village on the Red Sea.

Answer now!

Question 4:
A Scottish traveller came to Egypt in 1838 to study and sketch Egypt's most important archaeological sites, including Karnak Temple, the Nubian monuments, the Pyramids and the Sphinx. His works were compiled in a series of volumes entitled *Views in the Holy Land, Syria, Arabia, Egypt & Nubia*. Do you know who he is?

Previous questions were:

Question 1: An Arab city, built in 670AD by Oqba Ibn Nafie, is considered to be the first Muslim city built in North Africa and Islam's third holy city after Mecca and Jerusalem. What is it?

Question 2: The tomb of the boy king Tutankhamun was discovered on the west bank of the Nile by Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon. Do you know the actual date of the discovery?

Question 3: Wadi Natrun, located in the Western Desert between Cairo and Alexandria is famous for its monasteries. Do you know the origin of its name?

The prize is three days on a bed-only basis at the Sonesta Beach Resort, Sharm Al-Sheikh, courtesy of **Sonesta Hotels, Resorts & Nile Cruises.**

Name...
Address...
Tel. No. (if available)..
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Tourist trends in '95

Tourism is back on course. Visitors have been lured back to Egypt by promotional campaigns, and international tourist relations have been cemented at markets and conferences. **Rehab Saad** reports

It has been a good year for Egypt's tourist industry. Tourist numbers rose steadily, showing that the slump in the industry brought about by fears of terrorist attacks was well and truly over. Figures for the period from January to November 1995 show a 21.34 per cent increase in tourist numbers over last year, with a 31.8 per cent rise in the number of tourist nights.

A highly successful marketing campaign launched by the Ministry of Tourism played no small part in tempting the visitors. Italy, France, Great Britain, Germany, the USA and Japan were specifically targeted, and all of them registered significant increases in the number of tourists visiting Egypt: 131 per cent more from Italy, a 116.2 per cent increase from France, 67.5 per cent from Britain, 85.3 per cent from Germany, 59.7 per cent from the USA and 36.1 per cent from Japan. Meanwhile, Egypt was hard at work attracting new markets, such as South Korea, South Africa, the Benelux countries, Scandinavia and Brazil. Perhaps the greatest success story was Russia. One hundred thousand Russians came to Egypt in 1995 — a 129.6 per cent increase over previous years.

photo: Emad Abdel-Hadi

Tourists in Luxor are enjoying donkey riding at the West Bank

But as Egypt sought new markets and promoted its tourist attractions in existing ones, a traditional source of visitors, the Gulf region, sent fewer tourists to Cairo. Saudi tourist numbers dropped by a dramatic 24.24 per cent, largely because of mutual bad feeling in the wake of the flogging of an Egyptian doctor in Saudi Arabia who alleged that his son had been sexually abused by his Saudi headmaster.

This trend of more Westerners, fewer Arabs, can be seen by a comparison of figures between 1994 and 1995. In January to September 1994, Arabs constituted 38.8 per cent of Egypt's tourists, while 34.4 per cent came from western Europe. But this was reversed in the period from January to September 1995, when western Europeans constituted 41.1 per cent of visitors, whereas Arabs made up only 29.3 per cent.

Meanwhile the numbers of visitors who came to Egypt to attend conferences reached new records, with Cairo playing host to, among others, the UN Conference on Crime Prevention, the International Conference of Pediatricians and the General Assembly of the World Tourist Organisation (WTO). It is not only the big hotels and conference facilities that have benefited from the development of conference tourism. The most important aspect as far as the travel industry is concerned is that the visitors create a large market for pre- and post-conference tours around the country.

This year, as Egypt played host to the WTO's general assembly, tourist relations between Egypt and other countries were cemented by the signing of protocols and tourist agreements with Russia, the Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Morocco, Argentina and Syria. Egyptian Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui will head the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organisation for the coming two years. At the conference, Beltagui declared his intention of encouraging cooperation and promotion in tourism; he also pledged to encourage responsible tourist development, with the preservation of the environment a priority. In addition he is considering establishing a WTO centre for tourist training in Egypt which would serve the Middle East region as a whole.

Egypt also took part in many other international tourist gatherings, the most important of which was the World Travel Market (WTM) in London, which attracted 60,000 tourist officials and businessmen from 157 countries to discuss and promote tourism. The Egyptian delegation was led by El-Beltagui, who held 40 meetings with officials, businessmen and journalists including the British minister of state at the Foreign Office with responsibility for the Middle East. In a new development to emerge from the market, Egypt has agreed to take part in a British project whereby tourist information about Egypt will be placed on the Internet, enabling details to reach 30 million people worldwide.

As far as tourist investment is concerned, 100 tourist projects, with an overall area of 39 million square metres and a potential value of LE7.8 billion, were allocated for investment this year. One of the largest projects was launched at Sahl Hasheesh on the Red Sea. A contract was signed between the Ministry of Tourism and the National Bank of Egypt, along with insurance companies and businessmen, to develop the area, which covers 32 million square metres with a 12km shoreline. A special company, the Egyptian Company of Tourist Resorts, will be established to implement the project with a capital of LE700 million. The finished tourist centre will include 1,200 rooms.

Those involved in the industry are confident that the positive trend will continue into 1996. And Beltagui is determined that it will be a year of improved service and quality. "It is not enough just to have hotels, adverts on TV, and marketing campaigns," he said. "The last word will always be quality."

Environment protection efforts

Sherine Nasr rounds up new regulations introduced this year to protect the environment

Serious measures were taken in 1995 to tackle the problem of the encroachment on and deterioration of coral reefs in the Hurghada area of the Red Sea. According to Sayed Midian, head of Environment Administration in Hughada, not a single violation has been recorded. The highlights:

— The practice of some investors of filling in shallow coral reefs adjacent to holiday villages has been ended.

— Concrete jetties are no longer permitted, and those already in existence have been replaced by floating or column-based piers so as not to upset the natural ebb and flow of the tides.

— An environment impact assessment is now a requirement for every tourist project before a building licence is granted. The aim is to ensure that tourist projects do not drain natural resources or have a negative impact on environmental integrity.

— Jet skiis are now banned in Hurghada following complaints about noie pollution and disturbance.

— Shops in Hurghada selling coral and other protected ocean life forms have been given a two-month deadline to dispose of their stock. After January the selling of coral will be legally forbidden.

— Non-governmental organisations and USAID have been working closely to stop destruction of the coral reef. Sixty mooring buoys have already been installed along the beach and 200 more will be provided by the beginning of 1996. The buoys enable cruise boats to tie up instead of dropping anchor into the sea, thereby damaging the reefs.

— Hurghada hotels, diving centres and the Red Sea Governorate joined together in a major beach clean up along the Hurghada shoreline and on a number of offshore islands. Participants collected 12 tons of rubbish.

Meanwhile, Egypt's wealth of animal and bird life and how to protect it has been the centre of intensive studies at the Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency (EEAA). One major issue has been how to control hunting outside protected areas.

Hunting equipment is now officially banned from the Red Sea islands and protected areas of the Eastern Desert including Abraq, Al-Do'eab and Gabal Elba, south of Marsa Alam.

EEAA officials had several meetings with desert hunting guides, during which the guides agreed to report any violation of hunting regulations, in return for incentives. The Ministry of Tourism, travel agencies and other concerned bodies have been informed of the hunting regulations and the procedures which will be taken in case of violation.

The wetlands around Fayoum's 22 natural lakes, Ismailia, Wadi Al-Natrun and other areas which constitute ideal environments for migrant birds are also being closely observed. Hunting is only permitted between the third week of November and the end of March, and regulations restrict the numbers of birds each hunter is allowed to shoot. Hunting is permitted only between dawn and noon, and on certain lakes, hunting is allowed only once a week.

'95: Studs and duds

Throughout 1995, Egyptian athletes trotted around the globe in search of gold and excellence. Even though they came up empty handed more often than not, those who succeeded did so through their own volition, writes **Tarek El-Tablawy**

All's well that ends well, and as 1995 draws to a close, while some of Egypt's finest athletes toast themselves, and their team mates, with *Karkade*, those who failed to cut the mustard may find the year end festivities a more appropriate venue in which to commiserate, pout, ponder and lay blame.

Along with some edge-of-your-seat victories on the part of squash players, the handball, tae kwon do and wrestling teams, less fortunate teams found themselves embroiled in difficulties with their respective federations and the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports over budgets and ideological difficulties. These philosophical quandaries basically amounted to sports officials demanding top notch performances while being unwilling to shell-out the requested amounts for training and foreign camps.

To add insult to injury, they then threatened to penalise individuals or teams that failed to fulfill expectations. On the whole, these "incentives", which smacked more of East German training techniques than the tried and true formula of money plus practice equals victory, either fell short of the mark or were altogether ignored.

Throughout these controversies and coups, Egypt's sports officials managed to get organised enough to play host to several regional and international sporting events where some athletes made a name for themselves, and others, humiliated by their defeat, wished they could change theirs. Irrespective of how the Egyptian athletes did in these competitions, the competitions were organised well enough to earn kudos and cheers from international participants.

But while the year in sports for Egypt was, on the whole erratic, win or lose, in the spirit of true sportsmanship, the winners not-so-graciously flaunted their achievements while the losers grumbled and mumbled. Somewhere in the midst of this athletic circus, some achievements were realised.

Among the big winners for 1995 was the national squash team which placed third in the World Team Championship last November in Cairo. The team, led by its captain Amir Wagih, managed to hold their own, and return the speeding balls of a powerful, favoured Australian team which took fourth in the championship. Three of the team players managed to maintain a standard of excellence other athletes would be wise to envy. Omar El-Brollossy, Ahmed Barada and Ahmed Faizy, all of whom had snatched for Egypt the World Junior trophy in 1994, were the building blocks for this year's seniors team.

In their efforts to improve their rankings, the three players secured financial backing from sources outside the Egyptian Squash Federation (ESF). With a little blood, sweat and tears, their initiative seemed to pay off. Wagih is currently world-ranked 18th, while El-Brollossy is ranked 50th. Barada, who had risen to 30th prior to the New York Open several months ago, was forced to finish the year as number 32 in the world due to a shoulder injury which prevented him from participating in the World Individual's Championship. A fourth team member, Ahmed Faizi, ranked 56th in the world, is popularly viewed as a strong, young, up-and-comer. The team's third place finish, however, did not seem to please Sports Body Head Abdel-Moneim Wahba, who rejected ESF requests for an budget increase. "I'm an ambitious man for whom third place is not good enough," he said at a banquet held last week. "I'd rather see the team win first place and then consider a budget increase."

Logic, however, would dictate that first place in any event requires sufficient funding. But, this fact seems to be lost on many sports officials, and the same issue was painfully evident in September's 6th All Africa Games in Zimbabwe. Egypt, over the course of the Games' history had dominated the various events, and emerged victorious in four out of five of the African competitions. But this year, with many teams plagued by budget cuts, injuries, poor planning and little moral or financial support, Egypt was forced to relinquish its African crown to Games-newcomer, South Africa. In the final tally, Egypt placed second, winning 59 gold medals, 41 silver and 49 bronze.

The results, however, were misleading. The strongest performances, on the whole, were not to be found in the team sports but in individual events like judo, tae kwon do, weightlifting and swimming.

In the judo competition, Heba Rashid, a young, really, really heavyweight contender, did not just shine, she eclipsed the competition. The 150kg judoka came into the Games fresh from a crushing victory in Poland in March. Her slightly less-than-petite frame smothered the competition and helped her teammates bring home four gold medals. Like Barada and company, Rashid found her financing from outside sources. She was sponsored by the International Solidarity Committee.

In water, Rashid may flounder, though she is bound to float eventually, but Rania Elwani, AKA, the Golden Fish, sped through the Olympic-sized pool to capture three individual gold medals and one team silver. The team, as a whole, won 4 gold, 8 silver and 12 bronze. The weightlifting team, which had been plagued by budget problems prior to the Games, also did well. They heaved their way to a total of 23 medals and first place in the event.

Controversy also touched the wonderful world of football, Egypt's national sport. Although the national team came second in the Four-Nations Cup Tournament in South Africa last November, the club teams faced some difficulties in terms of rules regulating the trading of players and a standoff against the Egyptian Television Union over television rights and gate revenues. The result was that the country's various football teams, with the exception of the Ahli team which won its 59th title in the Arab Cup Winner's Championship in Cairo in March, floundered.

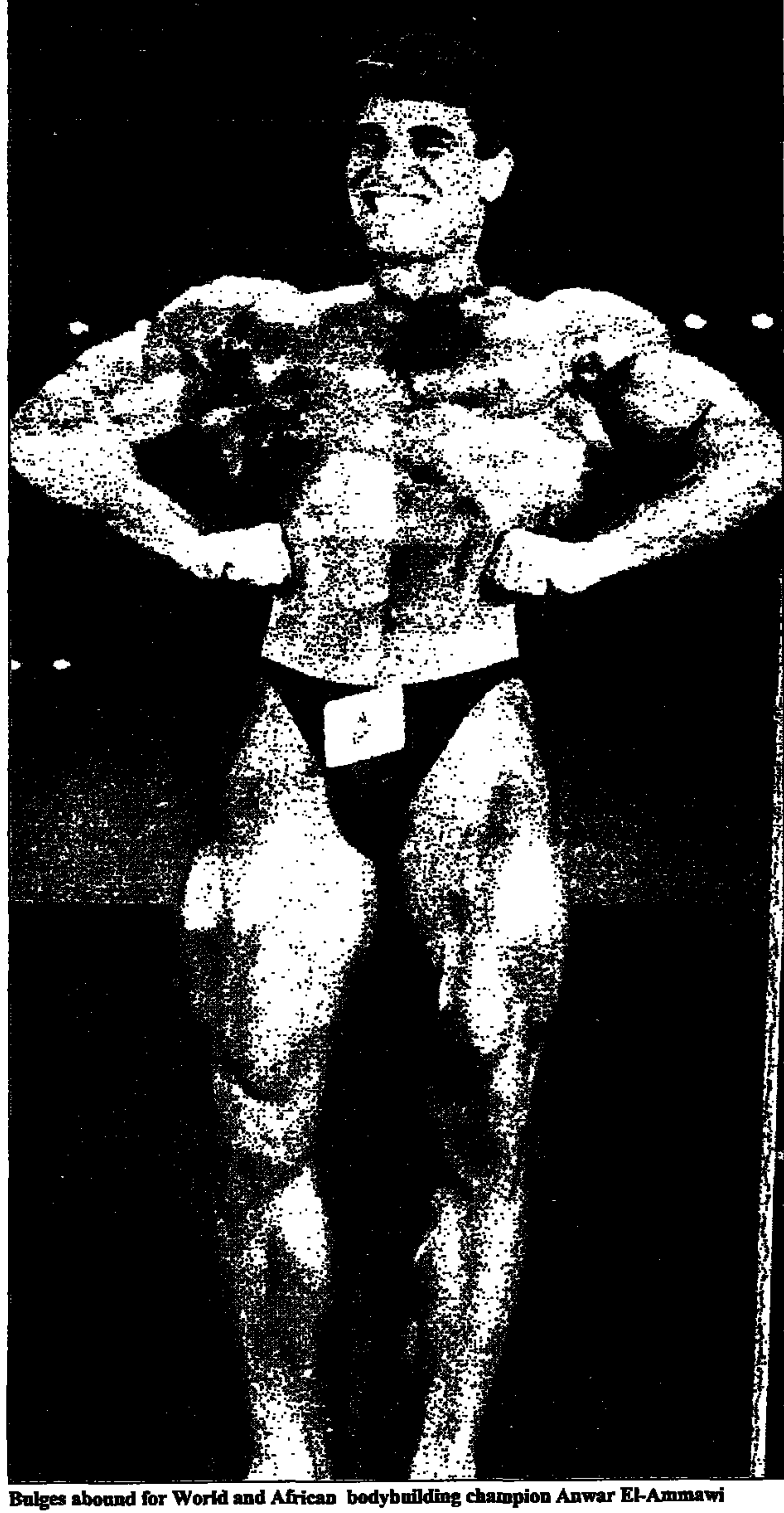
On a more heart-warming note, Egypt, for the first time officially, took part in the Summer Special Olympics, which is designed for the mentally disabled. Egypt fielded only 26 athletes, but came away with 21 medals.

The following month, it was often to rainy England for the Stoke Mandeville Championships. To the competition, which drew participants from 41 countries, Egypt sent seven swimmers, five track and field athletes and a basketball team. They came away with a total of 37 medals, 20 of which were gold. In the swimming competition alone, they won 25 medals. The same team won 77 gold, 55 silver and 30 bronze in the 2nd Afro-Arab Championship for the Disabled which was held earlier this month in Cairo. The success of these teams is probably greatly due to the fact that sports bureaucrats did not attempt to get heavily involved in the competitions.

Some teams like the basketball team and the volleyball team, played as if they were disabled. Although the men's *basketball team took the gold in the All* Africa Games, they played like the Keystone Kops and were truly blessed by the fact that they sank the ball through the hoop at all.

Looking back at the year in sports, trials and tribulations aside, it is apparent that the medals accumulated and records set were the product of the mettle of champions, the fortitude, intestinal or otherwise, that truly separates a star athlete from the rest of the pack. With teams like handball and tae kwon do qualifying for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, what remains to be seen is whether individual athletes will be able to continue to search within themselves to tap into the stuff that makes champions out of ordinary athletes. Sports officials take note, however, threats and empty promises do not a winning team make.

Reported by **sports desk staff**



Bulges abound for World and African bodybuilding champion Anwar El-Ammawi



Athlete of the year, swimmer Rania Elswani, the "Golden Fish"



World junior squash champion Ahmed Barrada



Ahli's handballer of the year and top scorer Sameh Abdel-Wareth



A powerful smash from Tamer El-Sawi



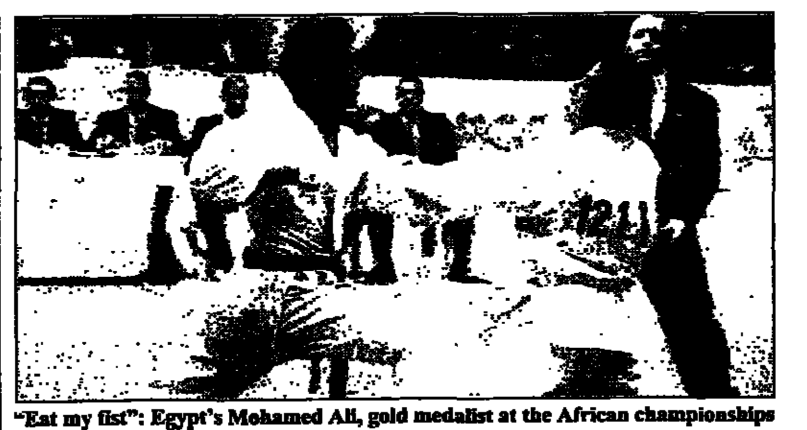
The squash team celebrate their third place world victory



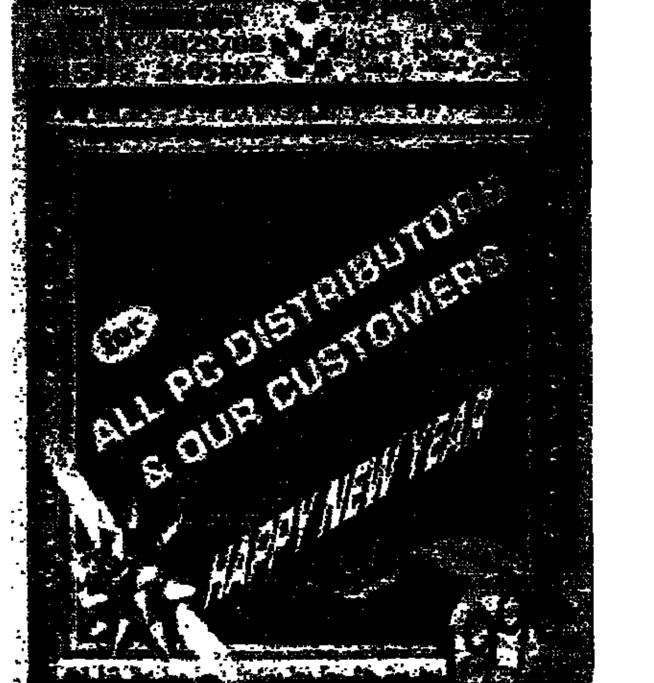
Jumping over the hurdles in the 9th Arab Athletics Championship



Egypt's Howeida Soliman displaying a routine at the 4 Continents Rythmic Gymnastics World Championship in Cairo



"Eat my fist": Egypt's Mohamed Ali, gold medalist at the African championships



Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Erminia Kamel: Intangible battles

The golden age of the bionic ballerina has yet to come. At present, her flights and spins belong to science fiction



photos: Sherif Sonbol

Jumping into the air 20 feet above stage level, a turn, on the way down, picking up a brother air-spinner. She lands and executes six repeated circular pirouettes in his arms, shoots out to stage centre, and rips off a couple of dozen fouettés *sur place*.

Legend says that way out in Sacramento Valley, California, there dwells a ballerina past 96 years old, remnant of a visiting Italian ballet company to San Francisco. At dawn every morning, it is said, she does 64 fouettés, double the number demanded of the heroine in act II of *Swan Lake*. Hair-raising. At 96, she's lucky if she has any hair to raise — but the legend of her fouettés remains.

At present we have to manage without the bionic ballerina. Erminia Kamel is not bionic but buoyant. She is as quick as light on her feet, getting around like a medium-tall human being on an invisible Vespa. Away from the spangles of the ballet scene she is troubling. First impression — she is not beautiful. Then she talks and moves and irradiates, and yes — she is beautiful. Better still, she is covered like the Golden Cockerel with a kind of patina which shines as she goes into action. Beautiful, yes, but a difficult flower to categorise.

Hothouse, no. Rather, she is northern, from near the mountains. A fitting impression, since she was born in Milan — a northern metropolis of a southern country — half of which faces the Alps. She is snowy and sunny at the same time. You do not have to love her when you first see her, because for sure you will when you leave her. There is the classic Italian thing about her — they make life shine and fizz, all of it, tragic or comic. Everyone else can seem that little bit dull. And style! They have made their own national version, and it immediately impresses. Erminia is part of this.

I did not ask her age, because I don't want to know. Boring to ask those who work in the theatre and are good, how old they are. Age has nothing to do with myth and quality. As a dancer, like the lady from Sacramento, old or young, you are pretty good if you can do it at all. Doing it at all is the thing. Dancing is so difficult, it defies all approaches at elucidation. That side of it belongs to the poets. The visual arts can go stale. They tire the eye through repetition. Their message has confines. But the moving universe of the dancer has none. It is supremely untouchable — not open to ordinary conception. To love the ballet demands almost an altered state. To perform it goes beyond even this — into the metempheric. Kamel knows all about the dancer's state, the limitations of the physical, and what must be delivered.

The week this talking was done, she said don't bother to quote me — quotes are tiresome, legalistic. Just get it all down as you wish. On the day of the meeting, Louis Malle, one of France's best film directors, had died. He had said to Burt Lancaster once: don't worry about the outside bits; it's the inside that matters. That is the Kamel philosophy. Of course, dancing is all sweat and misery, like battle and broken lives and limbs. That is part of the *metier*, but out of it, out of the human chaos and frailty, must come into every movement the musical purity from the human soul. She adored Nureyev. Whatever he was as a living creature, once the dancer had taken over, you were in the presence of the mystic thing. The simple raising of a hand was an event outside words and time.

Erminia Kamel was born in Milan, educated there, but lived in Monza — oh, yes, of the motor race fame. Monza is about half an hour from the centre of Milan. She therefore spent most of her young life in buses, going back and forth between the two places — or homes. The Teatro Alla Scala was more home than home. During her school years, she was exposed to the disturbing ritual of the classic ballet, when Margot Fontaine and Rudolf Nureyev visited the Scala in the Mac-millan production of *Romeo and Juliet*. This was the casting adrift of Erminia Kamel. The holy affliction, as it is called, had descended upon her. Many are chosen, some few are called. She understood then she was to be a dancer. This did not appear so to her parents. Her family were, she says, intellectuals. Those were stormy days for the species. Her father, an industrial designer, would have chosen a different career for his youngest daughter.

There is a time in Milan at the Scala each year, of introductory trials and exams for those who wish to enter the Scala Ballet School. For a young girl, it is an horrendous trial to enter the exalted halls of the most august, the most ancient and the toughest opera house in the world. She probably heard bells — whether of doom or exaltation matters little to a child crossing the threshold of a place which can question the actions of royalty or dictators. Only the gods of music and the stock exchange can call the Scala to question. She was examined like a potential prize race horse. Questioned then silenced. She undertook a few measures of the dance routines.

The Scala method is founded on the Cecchetti method, which was born and bred as a formula at the Scala itself. It has its tradition, therefore, of over centuries of ever-toughening methods of training children to enter into the full glare of the classic ballet. Armed with the Scala's benediction, you have reached the path of fulfillment. Erminia had passed. She was now admitted into the shrine: at the age of nine, she had become a pupil of the Ballet School of the Scala, Milan. The journeys to Monza became daily more stressful. The classes, promotional dramas and the ant-like activities of an opera house of premiere status filled every hour of her life. Ballet schools are like ancient Greek gymnasiums before steroids took over. No matter the stress of the body, it must be sacrificed to the work in hand: in those days, the temple came first; worker, ego; second. Hard-edged discipline which these late times are finding almost impossible to uphold. Kamel studied with the famous and the infamous. Best, she worked with Carla Fracci, a Scala product and super-star.

Kamel is neither tall nor short. An inch either way is deadly and can well shadow an otherwise great career: she passed through lacking a tiny inch, as she says. Inches are made of bones, and bones weigh. Too tall means weight: the ballerina must put forth more energy to assist her male partner in the lifts and turns of the long celebrated *pas de deux* which fill the ballet. All hell breaks loose if the ballerina can be accused of cheating her chum in the lifts. Smacked faces, resignations, even the law, have caused entire productions to collapse. Out front, a ballet audience knows the set-up: X won't jump; the old heave-ho needs a crane; she's breaking his back — or: she's a real guy, all the way up to Juliet's balcony. Kamel survived.

Ballet law says ballerinas are made by the possession of three or four major talents: the feet (points) — should be steel; elevation — the airborne take-offs and landings; the ability to turn (speedy spins); musicality. A ballerina can have the first three, but if she lacks musicality, she will never receive the critical acclaim which makes her immortal. And musicality counts most even to an ignorant audience. As the symphony swirls on and she is able to go with it in that special overdrive possessed by musical dancers, she has them in her grasp. Kamel has jumps, extreme lightness, Scala elegance — also musicality; but no steel feet. Her schooling was so finely attuned to her bodily needs, she applies an instrumental exactitude to steps she doesn't like. She makes everything fit by sheer expertise.

Mounting the steps to the top of the Scala is stiff, disciplined going. Everything by tradition and status. After her ten years as a student, Kamel had the sternest of all her trials — to pass through into the next rung. From 80 chosen girls, four only are picked to enter the corps de ballet. Important because a win takes her into the Scala as a worker. She won. Her stay in the corps would be totally traditional: 11 years. During this time, Nureyev came again to direct *Swan Lake*, and Kamel was chosen by him personally to be one of the three cygnets in the famous trio — considered a special favour for chosen girls. She had been accepted as a soloist and had finally arrived. The bells of Milan were surely ringing for her that day.

Soloists have a hard time. It is here that many fall by the wayside — the money is small and the competition is poisoned daggers for the tiniest part. Kamel, fortunately, caught some of the right eyes and she soon ran off with other roles. One was Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew*, which the Frankfurt Ballet had brought to the Scala. In the pure classical ballets, she did many divertissements and small solos — bees, birds, fish, peasants, fire-flies, wasps. She travelled and twirled through the insect world. And once she was promised a hippopotamus in the ballet version of *Dr Doolittle*, but it was dropped.

Another problem for young dancers is category. Kamel's build, and her mind and inclinations, were always turned to the contemporary. Her looks, however, were suited to the grand classics to which she was not drawn. She found out about the psychological possibilities of them, particularly *The Sleeping Beauty*, later in her career. Even though she lacks the ideal rigidity for the Cecchetti ballets, she sees the new possibilities in them that would suit her.

Once in her early soloist days, she survived the most shattering experience of her dancing life. As a dancer, you may slip, fall, trip or collapse. But to be dropped is an excursion into trauma not easily overcome. The company was playing in some large theatre out of Milan for a gala. The big stage had steps used for grand effects for which the dancers, particularly those of her grade in the company, had to trip lightly to the top. The males whisking the girls high over their heads, holding them aloft at arm's length, would swing them dramatically around in the air and bring them safely to the ground.

At the apex of Kamel's lift high over his head, her partner slipped on the stairs and dropped her. He just dropped her. When in the air to be dropped suddenly from that height on a staircase is like a fall from a cliff top. She remembers nothing, panic white-washed her mind. They picked her up, apparently, and she was hoisted onto a stretcher and hospitalised. She became "the dropped dancer". No bones were broken, no muscles strained; but her nerve was gone. It took time, but iron will, and the determination to dance again before any rival was given her place, prevailed.

At the time Nureyev came to dance Romeo, a young Egyptian, a friend of his and Margot Fontaine, danced the role of Mercutio. This was Abdel-Moneim Kamel. The role suited his forceful, rather aggressive, yet protective personality. He was taller than Nureyev. He made a great success. Then began a time of mutual understanding between him and Erminia. She says sometimes she felt lost and trembling like a jelly, and abandoned. All dancers and singers go through this phase. Their vulnerability both drives them away from and towards people. She felt secure with Abdel-Moneim and his dark chivalry. He can be savage, almost a balletic god-father. But he is there when needed. Never abandon a jelly in need. They got married in 1982, and in 1983 they came to Cairo. He was part of her life; his life was the Cairo Opera Ballet.

Strange aspect of the nomadism of the dancer — from Milan to Cairo. It might have been Europe. There was no need for coming to terms or acclimatising herself. So closed is the ballet world, it makes no difference where the routines are performed. Small things obtrude, but nothing more. She speaks of the Cairo Opera as her home, and she loves it. It is her place. She has a small son and seems happy. The matador, her husband, is there to fend off troubles.

Kamel's years here have seen great changes. The ballet has grown under Abdel-Moneim Kamel's spartan direction into a genuinely Egyptian home-grown instrument of projecting a large repertoire of works through which Erminia has developed her career. She began as Myrtha, the queen in *Giselle*, took on the Bejart *Bolero* — quite another style in which she was sexy, challenging and smoky. Back to the classics with *Swan Lake*, Acts I and III. *Don Quixote* — a charming soubrette role changing dramatically into big classical high-styled *pas de deux*: an immense challenge in which she shone. Then *Osiris*, Abdel-Rahim/Kamel's Egyptian ballet. Finally, Juliet — her best Cairo role so far.

If the company ever does a turn into the contemporary, then Kamel is one waiting. Her favourite ballet is Mac-millan's *Winter Dream*, followed by his *Manon*, with John Cranko's ballets offering a type of role she has yet to attempt. Real life roles, not classical fairies. These two, Mac-millan and Franco, have done the type of work she sees in ballet. She loves narrational ballets, people and characters, not myths.

In the turning-turtle of the cultures, looming up for the gala opening of the 21st century, ballet, says Kamel, must find new ways to express itself. Riots, assassinations, the destabilisation of entire nations: against all this where stands the ballet? Is the Lilac Fairy enough against the fate of nations? Are her healing powers strong enough to withstand the mayhem? Where do ballerinas fit into all this?

Ballet is ancient enough to cope with anything. It came from the East, saw and enveloped the West and inflated into a huge, Byzantine imperial design from which we have not yet recovered. So stands the profile of Erminia Kamel. She was almost born in an opera house, lived in one or another all her life, as much part of them as the velvet curtain going up on a performance. She's a theatre moth and eats red velvet carpets and gold curtains.

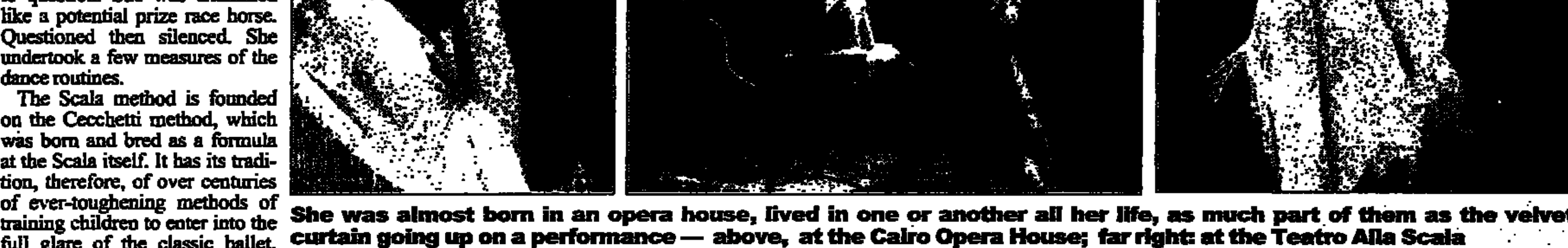
She says she came from Milan. Who is she really? She's a mystery, like an angel from a Florentine annunciation. Words, all, and always words. She's also a dancer. They use steps. They rise up out of the steps they make themselves and do not last — not even as long as singers. Their toughness permits them to carry on through everything. National calamity or earthquake, she will still be found doing her daily class of exercises. Do it, die or win. They are all soldiers facing the intangibles as they go into battle. Easy to laugh at them — why do it? Try it yourself and find out. Awareness is the essence.

Profile by **David Blake**









She was almost born in an opera house, lived in one or another all her life, as much part of them as the velvet curtain going up on a performance — above, at the Cairo Opera House; far right: at the Teatro Alla Scala

Pack of Cards

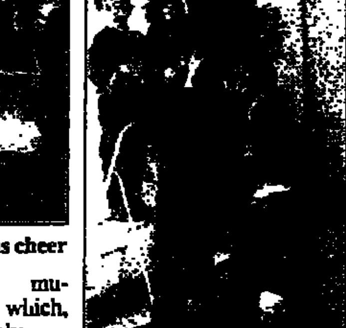
by Madame Sosostris

❤ These are the '90s, after all, dears. Gone are the days when **Father Christmas** tore across the sky in a reindeer-driven sleigh. Nowadays, he'll obviously settle for nothing less than a chauffeur-driven, automatic, five-gear model. Not that it really makes a difference. OK, so a few kids will be depressed for a while at their dreams being oh-so-suddenly and cruelly shattered, but the minute they see the marvellous supplies of nuts and Christmas cookies this Father Cairo Sheraton has left them, all will be forgotten in a moment. And, of course, there are more important things to think about. Such as who can get their bauble the highest up on the tree...



Preparing for the festivities and Christmas cheer

♣ There was only one thing President **Hosni Mubarak** needed to do before he addressed the new People's Assembly and *Shura* Council recently, and that was to go on a tour of the Assembly's lobby which had been renovated during the parliamentary summer break. And a good thing that he did, too, because he was obviously very pleased and impressed. Secretary-general of the Assembly and the energetic man behind the face-lift, **Sami Mahran**, told me that the lobby was styled after Ancient Egyptian temples. After that, the president barely had time to admire the newly renovated Assembly museum, which, Assembly speaker **Fathi Sorour** tells me, will soon be opened to all you commoners out there. And until it *is* open, you can read up on two new books on the history of the Egyptian Parliament, one written by **Mahran**, and the other by the head of the Assembly's translation department, **Mohamed Atrees**.





Sami Mahran

❤ Even now, dears, I still smile with delight whenever I remember the marvellous performance of *Carmina Burana* I saw last January at the Opera House. Many, however, did not get a chance to enjoy the show, and have, for the past twelve months been regretting the day they ever missed it. These very same people, though, are now skipping happily again, because, starting tonight, the Cairo Opera Orchestra, conducted by **Adel Shalabi** of the Richard Strauss Conservatoire in Munich, will be giving three consecutive shows. **Adel** has decided to give the performance a little extra twist this time, and he will be treating us to the *Carmen Suite* during the first half of the show. Meanwhile, the wife of the late composer **Karl Orff** will be gracing us with her esteemed presence in Cairo to attend the show. Now that in itself, dears, should tell you how good it promises to be. No wife would come all the way to Cairo to hear her husband's work being ripped to shreds, now would she? And before the show, she and a bevy of other esteemed partisans of the arts will be strolling round the Opera House's lobby perusing photographic genius. *Al-Ahram Weekly* photographer **Sherif Sonbol**, the sole and official Opera House photographer, has produced yet another collection of images brimming over with the same energy and serenity that all the best performances offer. The exhibit will be opened by Opera House director **Nasser El-Ansari** at 8pm tonight, and soars on until 8 January.

♠ I finally got a chance to go to the new Pyramids Hotel in Dokki last week. The event was a reception held by the Foreign Press Association, and hosted by its head, **Volkhart Windfuhr**, to celebrate the association's twenty-fifth anniversary. It was during that evening that I caught sight of my good friend and colleague **Mursi Saad El-Din**. Not that anybody could really miss him, as he went up to receive an award with a number of other journalists and media personalities who were honoured for their roles in the field. And as I was clapping away, who should I catch a glimpse of across the room but my good friend, minister of tourism **Mamdouh El-Beltagui**.

♦ I always look forward to seeing my good friend, violinist **Basma Abdel-Rahim**, who currently not only lives in Frankfurt, but is also a lead violinist in the Frankfurt Opera String Sextet and a member of the opera's orchestra. **Basma**, Egypt's first female violinist, will be flying in to Cairo this week to prepare for a violin recital, to be accompanied by British pianist and professor at the Cairo Conservatoire, **David Hales**, at the Opera House's Small Hall next Wednesday evening.

